


1996

Long-term marriage conflict and longevity strategies over the life span: a qualitative study

Julia Weeks Simanski
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd>

 Part of the [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), [Gerontology Commons](#), [Social Psychology Commons](#), and the [Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Simanski, Julia Weeks, "Long-term marriage conflict and longevity strategies over the life span: a qualitative study " (1996). *Retrospective Theses and Dissertations*. 11489.
<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/11489>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Retrospective Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Long-term marriage conflict and longevity

strategies over the life span:

A qualitative study

by

Julia Weeks Simanski

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department: Human Development and Family Studies

Major: Human Development and Family Studies (Family Studies)

Major Professor: Joyce M. Mercier

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

1996

Copyright © Julia Weeks Simanski, 1996. All rights reserved.

UMI Number: 9635355

**Copyright 1996 by
Simanski, Julia Anne Weeks**

All rights reserved.

**UMI Microform 9635355
Copyright 1996, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.**

**This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

UMI
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

**Graduate College
Iowa State University**

**This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation of
Julia Weeks Simanski
has met the dissertation requirements of Iowa State University**

Signature was redacted for privacy.

Major Professor

Signature was redacted for privacy.

For the Major Department

Signature was redacted for privacy.

For the Graduate College

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	4
METHODS	24
RESULTS	35
DISCUSSION	77
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS	95
APPENDIX A. HUMAN SUBJECTS FORMS	98
APPENDIX B. SAMPLE OF TRANSCRIPT	100
APPENDIX C. SAMPLES OF LIFE GRAPHS	101
REFERENCES	106

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my Major Professor, Dr. Joyce Mercier for all of her valuable suggestions and advice. She always made the time to edit, encourage, and advise me throughout the duration of the project. Most of all, she believed in my abilities and my time lines. I am deeply grateful for all of her contributions.

Next, I am especially appreciative of my husband, Todd Simanski. He was constantly supportive and helped me "see the light at the end of the tunnel" when I did not think there was one. Many times he sacrificed our time and weekends together for my schedule throughout my graduate program. I am eternally grateful for his love, his encouragement, and his undying belief that I could do this.

I am also very thankful for the support of my family. My mother and father have never doubted my ability to do anything I set out to do, and fostered my desire to pursue an advanced degree from a very early age. My sisters calmed and rallied me in my periods of frustration. Finally, my brother has been a wonderful colleague. He has allowed me the opportunity to discuss and share ideas and theories and challenged me throughout my academic career.

I am also appreciative of the time and advice given by members of my committee. Admittedly, it was not always easy to schedule meetings and obtain their signatures, but their expertise was always welcomed and valued.

Finally, a big thanks to the 15 couples who so graciously agreed to participate in the study. Without their candid words and clear memories, I would have not learned about the enduring love and occasional conflicts of long-term marriages.

ABSTRACT

The study is an exploratory, qualitative study investigating the frequency, sources, and resolution strategies of conflict in long-term marriages. In addition, keys to a lasting marriage were explored. Fifteen couples married over 50 years or more were interviewed using an unstructured question format. The life graph was another methodological tool used to help couples recall major life events and give perspective to their married lives. Direct quotations of the respondents illustrated the findings. Couples' perceptions of major life events were similar, yet recalled primarily in relation to their roles within the marriage as either caretaker or provider. Marital conflict throughout the life span was reported as minimal, and most couples avoided conflict rather than actively engaging in it. Respect and commitment were major contributors to marital longevity. Gender differences and cohort effects greatly affected spouses' perceptions of conflict and marital life.

INTRODUCTION

Logically, as there is an increase in the number of elderly people in the United States, there would seem to be an increase in the number of older persons involved in long-term marriages. According to Census data, (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983) married couple households with persons 65-74 years of age make up 9% of married couple households. By the year 2050, adults over 65 will comprise 31.6% of the U.S. population (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1989). Considering current population trends, it is not unthinkable to conclude the number of long-term marriages also will increase.

There has been some discrepancy over how many years of marriage constitute a long-term marriage. Some studies cite marriages as little as 20 years up to as much as 55.5 years. However, as older marriages have become more prevalent in our society the most consistent period of time studied was marriages of 40 or more years. Individuals within these marriages are usually 60 or older (Ade-Ridder, 1985; Sporakowski & Axelson, 1984).

Couples who have achieved long-term marriage status are survivors. Glick and Norton (1977) indicated that only one marriage in five will see its 50th anniversary. Average couples of today who live out their expected span of years can expect a marriage to last 48 years (Swenson and Moore, 1979). At ages 55-64, 81 percent of men and only 67 percent of women are married. By age 75 and older, a wider gender gap occurs. Married men account for 70 percent of the population over 75 compared to only 22 percent of married women (Gilford, 1986). Not only are golden wedding couples survivors due to both partners' longevity, but considering the high divorce rates in the U.S., they have

overcome the odds. As assumed, younger couples continue to divorce, but now couples in the midlife to later stages of life account for 20% of current divorces (Weishaus & Field, 1988). Some researchers have surmised that as many as two-thirds of all first marriages may end in divorce (Martin & Bumpass, 1989). Clearly, individuals in long-term marriages have, first, been able to outlive many of their counterparts, but also have been able to sustain a marital relationship over a very long time, which is sometimes rare in modern times (Brubaker & Kinsel, 1985).

Although there has been a relatively large amount of research that examines marital satisfaction, communication, and the quality of marriage concerning married couples in the newly-wed to middle-age stages, there has been very little written about couples in the early to late retirement stages. Moreover, it is difficult to generalize that the premises assumed in early life stages of marriages would be applicable to later-life marriages because life-experience, adaptation skills, and values of elderly couples would be most likely different (Zietlow & Sillars, 1988). Marriages continue to evolve throughout their lifespan. Consequently, there is a great deal that can be learned about marriage relationships during the later years and what accounts for the enduring relationship.

Because the literature surrounding long term marriages, particularly marriages beyond the 50 year mark, is relatively minimal, it is worthwhile to begin an examination of the lives and social patterns of older couples. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore and discover the conflict sources, relationship strategies, and the past salient experiences of husbands' and wives' marital lives and how each partner interprets and perceives the direction of conflict throughout the marital career.

Qualitative designs support a range of research purposes. Traditionally, ethnography has had the purpose of discovering and describing a particular culture. However, other qualitative methods, such as interviewing and participant observation,

support the research purposes of examining patterns and regularities within phenomena or events to understanding the meaning of particular life events (Ferguson, 1993). Thus, the purpose of this study is consistent with the goals and methods of qualitative research. In addition, without access to longitudinal marital data, a qualitative, retrospective design would be the most appropriate methodology for unraveling the social interactions of married couples throughout their life span and particularly for understanding the evolving history of marital conflict across the life stages. Moreover, a qualitative design allows couples to tell their experiences in their own words and from their own perspectives (Allen & Pickett, 1987).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature that describes long-term marriages, and specifically conflict in long-term marriages, was not concentrated in one field of study. Thus, the literature review drew from several interdisciplinary areas, including family studies, family therapy, and communication studies. First, the characteristics of the long-term marriage were discussed. Next, an explanation of interpersonal conflict was described as well as the strategies couples utilized to resolve or negotiate conflict within the marriage. Finally, two theoretical frameworks were introduced as a guide for the research study.

Long Term Marriages

Life cycle changes

Older marriages must deal with unique challenges as they enter the stage of later life. Retirement, family role changes, social roles, and the aging process itself changes the context of a long-term relationship. Wolinsky (1986) discussed some developmental tasks that long-term couples should work to resolve. First, the aging couple learns to re-define and nurture new ways of dealing with intimacy issues. Men in the later stages of life have a tendency to rely solely on their wives for intimacy and support (Greenbaum & Rader, 1989). In fact, husbands named their wives as confidants more frequently than wives named their husbands.

Secondly, because of retirement, a couple may need to develop alternate interactional patterns and re-negotiate roles within the home. Retirement entailed both benefits and costs for the marital relationship. The transition to retirement may benefit the relationship as outside commitments, role conflicts, and time constraints are reduced, which increases the couple's opportunity for companionship (Ward, 1993). A retired

husband's entrance into the home changes the division of household labor and decision making patterns (Ekerdt & Vinick, 1991). In fact, some research has suggested there is an increase in housework by older retired men and a greater gender equity (Ward, 1993). Yet, typically older women continue to have the primary responsibility for housework. Moreover, a retired husband's presence disturbed the wife's household and social routines. Some wives complained that retirement reduced their personal privacy and control, caused too much "togetherness," and left husbands with too little to do (Ekerdt & Vinick, 1991). If spouses had a difficult time adjusting to the new patterns of retirement, tension and conflict ensued (Greenbaum & Rader, 1989). The period was particularly problematic if the husband retired first. Women who were employed and had retired husbands exhibited less marital satisfaction (Lee & Shehan, 1989). Additionally, compounded stress to the wife occurred, as many wives considered it their responsibility alone to negotiate a transition into retirement (Gilford, 1986).

Finally, it is important that long-term couples not lose sight of their individual and couple goals and be prepared to set new goals which are appropriate and attainable (Wolinsky, 1986). As the elderly couple shifted into the later part of the life cycle, they depended less on institutions and offspring and more on their mate (Greenbaum & Rader, 1989). Hence, the transition and adaptation into a new life stage truly becomes a "couple event."

Marital satisfaction

Most research indicated that older couples tended to say they were very satisfied with their relationships (Ade-Ridder, 1985). In fact, marriage helped minimize disruptive life cycle events such as retirement, reduced income, and declining physical ability (Gilford, 1986). Stinnett, Carter, and Montgomery (1972) indicated that older persons

even considered their marital relationship to be more satisfactory than before. White, Booth, and Edwards (1986), in a cross-sectional study, found that couples in the later stages of life reported higher marital happiness, satisfaction, or adjustment than those in the middle stages. Yet, those who perceived their marriage to be satisfactory in the later years have most likely regarded it as such from the beginning. It is possible, however, that higher levels of perceived marital satisfaction in the later years of life is attributable to the gradual attrition of the unhappily married couples from cross-sectional samples (Lee, 1988). Rowe and Meredith (1982) reported that among those married 50 or more years, 80% recalled their marriages as being happy from their wedding day to present. Some recent cross-sectional studies have even indicated a curvilinear pattern (Schumm & Burgaighis, 1986). Initially, very early stages of marriage were usually periods of happiness followed by a low in early child-rearing years and finally an upswing of happiness again in the later years of marriage (Ade-Ridder, 1985). Yet another study (Gilford, 1986) reported that spouses at the younger and older extremes of old age (ages 55-62 and 70-90) experienced considerably lower marital satisfaction than spouses at the mid-state of old age (age 63-69). In terms of gender, men were generally more satisfied with their marriages than women (MacKinnon, MacKinnon, & Franken, 1984).

Companionship was an important quality of a long-term marriage. Laur and Laur (1986) found that individuals involved in long-term, happy marriages reported that spouses were "best friends" and had a commitment to the relationship. Stinnett (1972) explained that couples viewed their present periods of life as the happiest because the older couple had greater freedom and more time to enjoy each other's companionship than in the past. Additionally, over the course of a long-term relationship individuals, became more similar. Hence, shared leisure activities accentuated the level of compatibility and flexibility within the relationship (MacKinnon et al., 1984).

Commitment to the relationship was an overriding factor in the stability of long-term marriages. Gilford (1986) contended that the present cohort of "golden era" marriages was particularly affected by the value and obligation of commitment. These values stemmed from traditional religious and family beliefs. Commitment to the spouse and to the institution of marriage was one of the most prevalent reasons for marital stability in both happy and unhappy couples. This meaning also was extended to include a willingness to endure difficult times with a spouse (Laur & Laur, 1986; Robinson & Blanton, 1993).

Those couples who had compatible goals toward child rearing and experienced greater involvement in church activities also were more likely to maintain long-term relationships (MacKinnon et al., 1984). Although the issues of control, autonomy, and dependency remained important to the elderly couple, family still played an integral role in the marital and life satisfaction of older couples. An older person gained a sense of self worth and accomplishment through relationships with family (Wolinsky, 1986). Obviously, the configuration of the family of later life changed due to new roles and extended family, yet continued contact and interaction with children was positively related to the well being of long-term marriages (Swenson et al., 1984). Wolinsky (1986) contended that familial interactions were most stable and beneficial when older parents allowed children to build their own lives and a separate identity and interactional boundaries were clear.

Sexual intimacy

Despite the societal myths, sexual interest and intimacy remain an integral part of long-term marriages (Gilford, 1986). Ade-Ridder and Brubaker (1983) found that a positive correlation existed between sexual interest and marital happiness. In a national study, 53% of married persons age 60 and older reported having sex at least once within

the last month. Only 24% of married persons 76 and older reported having engaged in sexual relations during the past month (Marsiglio & Donnelly, 1991). Declines in frequency of intercourse were due to physical limitations of the husband. Decreases in sexual activity may be attributed to decrease in interest and increase in age. Yet, sexual patterns established in the middle ages of marriages were most likely to continue into later stages (Ade-Ridder, 1985). Marsiglio and Donnelly (1991) suggested that males tended to be the ones responsible for curtailing or discontinuing sexual activity among older couples as they were typically the older individual of the two.

The range of sexual expression seemed to be diverse and creative for the older couple. Specifically, in a study of older women aged 50-82, a need was reported for both passionate and companionate love. High levels of passionate love were strongly correlated to satisfaction and happiness (Traupmann, Eckels, & Hatfield, 1982). Although some couples may not have high levels of intimacy, they were pleased with each other and had moderate to high affect (Weishaus & Field, 1988). It appeared touch and physical closeness continued to be important factors for expressing intimacy (Gilford, 1986). Roberts (1980) noted that long-term couples mentioned specific examples of feet touching in bed, lying close together, and holding hands as a means of sexual expression.

Health

Health also makes a difference in the assessment of marital satisfaction. According to Stinnett (1972), poor health was perceived by older husbands and wives to be one of the major problems during the present period of their lives. Heyman and Jeffers (1968) provided strong evidence that wives with healthy husbands were happier in their marriages. Zarit (1986) suggested that older women resented caretaking responsibilities in later life as that period could have offered a time for personal growth and opportunity. Moreover, the

added strain and burden may have a negative effect on the overall quality of the relationship. Atchley (1988) argued that poor health was a major cause of low self-esteem among older persons, which may indirectly affect an individual's perception of marital quality. Overall, good health may be related to a positive marital relationship.

Married persons tended to be both happier and healthier compared to widowed or divorced persons of the same age bracket (Gilford, 1986). Although wives tended to experience some type of loneliness within the marital relationship, on the whole, married older persons experienced less loneliness. A couple's transition and adjustment to retirement played a major role in the morale of individuals in long-term relationships (Sporakowski & Axelson, 1984).

Gender roles

The sex roles couples engaged in during the course of their relationships influenced their behavior, communication, and perceptions and may ultimately have shaped the type of marriage they have. Fitzpatrick (1988) developed a relational typology for categorizing marriages based upon sex role traits and communication style. In the typology, she described four different types of marriages: traditionals, separates, independents, and mixed. The traditional couple was very committed to the marital relationship, was comfortable in verbal and nonverbal communication with one another, believed in similar values, and engaged in conventional, often stereotypical, male and female roles. Consequently, because there is mutual agreement in the norms and conventions within the marriage, conflict is seldom the result of power struggles. Most often traditionals experience higher levels of marital satisfaction and best understood each other.

Independents were couples who enjoyed the psychological satisfaction of marriage, stressed individualism, and enjoyed time away from the marriage in outside relationships.

Conventional male/female norms were not adhered to and were often the root of conflict. Independents were willing to engage actively in open conflict and were seemingly uncomfortable with uncertainty and change (Reuter & Webb, 1992).

Separates were married and lived together, but the relationship was often the result of habit and convenience. Little energy, little conflict, and neutral affect were very often factors within the separate marriage. The relationship provided them with stability, but was not one of personal closeness. Overall, communication was inexpressive, lacked disclosure, and avoided conflict. Separates were comforted by their ability to have separate time and interests. Despite the emotional distance of these couples, divorce or separation was rarely discussed. In fact, couples developed a separate type of relationship in order to escape the possible emotional and social stress of divorce.

Mixed couples were those in which the spouses did not agree on their marriage type. For example, the wife described herself as an independent, whereas her husband defined himself as a separate. Mixed couples comprised about 40% of all typed marriages (Fitzpatrick, 1988).

Few studies have been conducted to understand how the aging process and sex roles affect marital communication. In an exploratory study, Reuter and Webb (1992) reported that long-term couples seldom fell into the category of independents. It was postulated that an independent's behavior does not work to facilitate or sustain marriages over long periods of time. Instead, an independent may shift his/her style into that of a separate. Elderly couples most often described their relationship as separates. In fact, the length of marriage was a significant predictor of marital types. The older the marriage, the more likely they would be a separate. Yet, a separate marriage may be the result of the particular age cohort and was not necessarily an indicator of an unhappy marriage. If the couple adopted traditional roles throughout their marriage in which the husband developed

his career, while the wife worked as a homemaker, the couple may not have ever learned or had a lifestyle that allowed an interactional relationship. Yet, other studies (Fitzpatrick, 1988) found that elderly couples were most consistent with the traditional type of marriage in which conventional sex roles and commitment were exhibited within the marriage. Again, the age cohort defined them as traditionals in that the values and expectations surrounding sex roles were more firmly emphasized in their early years of marriage. Consequently, the marital relationship took on a very socially prescribed, traditional nature of interaction.

The gender differences in relationships may stem not so much out of the individual's biological sex, but out of sex traits an individual has been socialized to develop. Women in long-term relationships were concerned about emotional support. They enjoyed giving and getting support and merely being together with their husbands (Argyle & Furnham, 1983). Yet, in most elderly couples, women were more likely to receive less affectional support than husbands received, but enjoyed more closer friendships within informal social networks than men (Quirouette & Gold, 1992). In terms of health, wives reported lower satisfaction with their health than husbands, and the health of other family members. Additionally, traditional gender roles put women at higher risk for mental stress than men as wives typically maintained care giving activities and were expected to respond and be attentive to the needs of their husbands.

The quality of a marriage was tightly bound to the husband's mental and physical health (Quirouette & Gold, 1992). In reference to the previous study, marital quality for both partners was significantly improved when the husband's physical and mental health were good. Men enjoyed sharing activities with their wives in the later stages of life and often took on transportation responsibilities and helped with household chores (Gilford, 1986).

Interestingly, Brubaker and Kinsel (1985) noted that, in the later stages of life, there was a tendency for spouses to become less gender specific. Expressive roles were cited as important factors for both spouses (Roberts, 1980). On the other hand, a "cross-over" in sex role orientation may even occur in later life stages. Men may become less aggressive, and women become more aggressive than they were before (Brubaker & Kinsel, 1985). Men developed more nurturing types of behaviors whereas women sought to develop independence once freed from caretaking responsibilities. Troll, Miller, and Atchley (1979) reported similar findings. They contended that husbands became more tender in the later years, but wives often perceived this increased tenderness to be clinging. The division of labor within the home was often an indicator about how firmly couples adhered to traditional sex roles. Brubaker and Kinsel (1985) reported that elderly couples were more likely to share tasks than divide them, which may indicate the lack of rigidity in former roles after retirement.

Conflict in Marriages

Conflict in communication

What is conflict? Hall (1987) broadly defined conflict as a "disagreement between two or more persons" (p. 768). More specifically, interpersonal conflict involves communication about incompatible goals (Canary, Cunningham, & Cody, 1988). It is perceived that if one party achieves their goals the other cannot (Pearson, 1993). Smetana (1989) described conflict as "times when people don't get along or have conflicts or disagreements. These may be about major issues or decisions, or they may be about everyday responsibilities" (p. 1054). There is a delicate balance between conflict that precipitates positive benefits and conflict that disrupts a relationship. Conflict can have a

positive function within the relationship. Conflict clarifies rights, establishes power hierarchies, marks interpersonal boundaries, promotes communication, or provides an outlet for the expression of negative feelings (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993). On the other hand, problematic conflict may involve heightened frequency, intensity, duration, aggressiveness, and disturbance of relationships (Hall, 1987). However, conflict is not present in the interpersonal setting when one person is aware of a problem but tells no one about it. Both of the communicators must be aware a conflict exists (Pearson, 1993).

In dealing with conflict, resolution strategies need to be identified. Unproductive conflict strategies include blaming, name-calling, threats, involving other people, asking loaded questions, distorting reality, and avoiding the real issues (Hall, 1987). Positive conflict strategies involve putting forth a genuine effort to resolve conflict, creating a positive tone, and participating in active listening (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993). Generally, conflict resolution strategies can be classified into three main categories. First, avoidance tactics involve the minimization of conflicts. Individuals may deny the existence of conflicts, shift the topic, or communicate indirectly about the conflict. It may indicate a lack of concern for the self or the relationship (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993). Second, distributive tactics are competitive and often aggressive. Statements that include criticism, faulting, threats, and rejection are utilized. It is often characterized as putting one's own concerns above the relationship and having minimal concern for the other individual's feelings (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993). Finally, integrative tactics are cooperative and problem-solving oriented. The communicators usually demonstrate empathy and support for the other person and try to work out problems so that there is mutual agreement between the parties (Sillars, Parry, Coletti, & Rogers, 1982). There is a balance between the concern for the relationship and one's own concerns (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993).

Marital conflict

Because all interpersonal relationships have a certain degree of conflict present, it is inevitable that marriages also endure a certain amount of conflict. How couples choose to resolve differences ranges from totally avoiding conflict to actively engaging in it (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993). Open communication and positive conflict resolution strategies are relevant factors in satisfying marriages. For most, conflict is a type of communication pattern that is common even in the most satisfying relationships (Cloven & Roloff, 1991; Kirchler 1988). Kirchler (1988) contended that marital happiness was associated with conflict resolution strategies rather than with the probability of conflict.

Research has shown that intimate couples were more likely to engage in frequent and intense arguments than acquaintances (Cahn, 1990). In fact, even happy couples reported up to one conflict in every five-day period (Birchler, Weiss, & Vincent, 1975). On the other hand, marriage partners who experienced more serious and frequent conflicts tended to be less happy and satisfied. Conflict can contribute to a lack of love, self-concept, and result in negative reciprocity between partners (Cahn, 1990). Conflict is typically not destructive in a marriage, however, if it retains some positive effects such as affection, humor, positive problem solving, agreement, assent, empathy, and active non-defensive listening (Gottman, 1991).

Couples who lacked relationship skills, particularly problem-solving abilities, experienced significantly less marital harmony (Haefner, Nortarius, & Pellegrini, 1991). Marriages that lacked conflict resolution skills endured more frequent and unresolved conflicts, which started a cycle of negativity. In fact, negativity expressed through non-verbal channels of communication was perhaps one of the strongest predictors of a distressed marriage (Haefner et al., 1991). Moreover, negative behaviors were clearly understood as negative by partners and thus were likely to evoke a negative response

(Acitelli, Douvan, & Veroff, 1993). Consequently, the accumulation of unresolved conflicts and negative feelings toward one another more likely leads to the development of marital distress over the life span. However, higher levels of marital satisfaction buffered negative interactions. Thus, marital satisfaction seemed to be a variable that moderated the couple's reaction to ongoing conflict (Haefner et al., 1991).

Christiansen and Pasch (1993) classified marital conflict on two dimensions. The closeness dimension encompassed conflicts that dealt specifically with relationship needs. It was the "extent to which partners have frequent, intense, and diverse interchanges that last over a period of time" (Christiansen & Pasch, 1993, p. 5). Christiansen and Pasch (1993) proposed that the most common and important conflicts of interest within a marriage centered around the issue of closeness or the extent to which spouses' lives were interconnected. Frequent conflicts over closeness were highly associated with marital dissatisfaction. In fact, in another study by Christiansen and Shenk (1991), those couples who were in clinic situations or were seeking divorce cited conflicts of closeness as being a more common source of conflict than nondistressed couples.

The second conflict dimension in marital conflicts was that of dominance. This dimension involved conflicts that precipitated because of a couple's differences in decision making and control. One partner may have more influence or control than the other in areas such as decision making and division of labor (Christiansen & Pasch, 1993). Some studies have shown a relationship between power distribution and marital satisfaction (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983). These types of conflicts were more likely to develop when couples handled either daily stressors or major life events.

The dominant perspective among marital researchers is that the avoidance of conflict is more harmful than constructive engagement (Christiansen & Pasch, 1993). By engaging in conflict, couples are given the opportunity to learn more about each other, to differentiate

from each other, and to learn to effectively solve problems facing their relationship (Pearson, 1993). Thus, it is a marital myth that disagreement is destructive to a relationship. The perception that conflict is negative was negatively correlated with marital adjustment for nondistressed and distressed couples (Crohan, 1992). More specifically, one study found that couples who believed that confrontation was negative in regard to their relationship often used more negative conflict strategies of coercion and avoidance, which were related to lower marital happiness (Crohan, 1992).

Overall, it appeared that couples developed rules and patterns on how to fight within the first year of marriage. Rules were developed for decision making in terms of resolving conflict and settling differences between family members (Honeycutt, Woods, & Fontenot, 1993). When these negotiated patterns were congruent between partners, couples felt better about their marriage (Acitelli et al., 1993). Conflict rules that emerged in marriages were rules of understanding, rationality, conciseness, and consideration (Honeycutt et al., 1993). It was characteristic of happy marriages to endorse all of these rules when resolving conflict. However, when these rules were violated, it disrupted the relationship and reduced the intimacy of the dyad (Honeycutt et al., 1993). These patterns, whether negative or positive, appeared to be important indicators to the longevity of the marital relationship.

Gender differences in marital conflict

Gender differences also may affect how couples deal with conflict. Studies have differed on the exact roles a female or male takes during conflict. For example, some studies found that females were more cooperative than males, but other studies stated the opposite was true (Canary, Cunningham, & Cody, 1988). There were some particular conflict styles however, that specific genders have a tendency to adopt. For example,

women were more likely to pursue conflict strategies that maintained a positive relationship and used fewer avoidance tactics than men (Canary et al., 1988). They also tended to use a style that stressed interpersonal relations and was perceived as attentive and open (Berryman-Fink & Brunner, 1987). In addition, women were more likely to report they compromised in conflict more than their spouses did (Berryman-Fink & Brunner, 1987). However, when conflicts involved the need for more closeness or a change in the allocation of household responsibilities, women took on a more demanding role (Christiansen & Pasch, 1993). To summarize, women were characterized as preferring conflict styles, that can be described as prosocial, regressive, compromising, and avoiding (Berryman-Fink & Brunner, 1987).

On the other hand, men preferred more dominating and cooperative styles (Berryman-Fink & Brunner, 1987). Men did not generally use negotiation techniques and used verbally aggressive persuasive strategies (Berryman-Fink & Brunner, 1987). They also were more likely to use denials during the course of conflict (Canary et al., 1988). However, men had a tendency to want greater independence within the marriage and perhaps took on a withdrawing role (Christiansen & Pasch, 1993). Overall, men preferred conflict styles which were characterized as antisocial, dominating, and competitive (Berryman-Fink & Brunner, 1987).

Conflict in long-term marriages

Communication was a necessary component to the maintenance of long-term marriages. Being able to openly share one's emotions and beliefs allowed couples to exchange needs and concerns comfortably (MacKinnon et al., 1984). However, cohort differences hindered open communication in older couples. Those couples influenced by pre-1960's popular culture were less likely to value self-disclosure and open expression.

In fact, elderly couples reported less expression of affection and self-disclosure than couples at any other life stage (Zietlow & Sillars, 1988).

An aspect of effective communication that affected the stability of long-term marriages was good conflict management (Laur & Laur, 1986). Lasswell and Peterson (1981) reported that 20% of older marriages were highly conflicted, 20% were very satisfied and reported few conflicts, and the balance of older marriages were "connubial endurance contests," with either apathy or corrosive conflict. However, Sporakowski and Axelson (1984) reported that, when couples agreed on problems and needs, there was a positive relationship to marital quality. Many older couples seemed to be better adjusted and tended to see themselves as less demanding, temperamental, and irritable (Stinnett et al., 1972). Long-term couples stressed that attacking the issue and not the mate was important as well as the ability to remain calm and flexible (Laur & Laur, 1986). In problem-solving communication, elderly couples used fewer evaluative statements and were much less likely to disagree than young married couples. In addition, Zietlow and Sillars (1988) asserted that older couples were more noncommittal, nonanalytical, inexpressive, and less likely to shift between conflict styles during conflict. MacKinnon et al. (1984) reported that older couples had a larger capacity to deal with conflict in a positive manner than couples at other life stages. McConagle, Kessler, and Schilling (1992) reported that a negative relationship was found between length of marriage and disagreement frequency. Longer married couples seemed to cope better with conflict than those married more recently. This finding may be the result of the long-term married being able to reframe and redefine stressful events and problems to make them more positive. Hence, conflict resolution patterns in elderly couples may be the result of trial and error over time or may be behaviors prescribed by an older cohort.

Because of an older couple's long-term experience and adaptation to one another, it might be expected that older couples experience less conflicts and are less analytical about their marriage (Zietlow & Sillars, 1988). Indeed, retired couples did report less marital problems. This may be partially due to the absence of children from the home.

Interestingly, Argyle and Furnham (1983) found a high level of conflict and satisfaction in the marriage after the children left, but an overall reduction of marital problems. Yet, it may be difficult to fully understand the amount of conflict within a long-term marriage as older couples tended not to disclose about problem areas in marriages as compared to young couples (Zietlow, 1986). Interestingly, older people tended to have less amounts of conflict in their spousal relationships than with neighbors or work associates (Argyle & Furnham, 1983). Yet, the types of problems that were prevalent in elderly marital relationships were not discussed.

Finally, there has been little written about the sources of problems causing conflict in long-term marriages. Chatters and Taylor (1989) outlined a list of problems that affected older Black adults that cover such areas of money, children, and health but the study did not specifically address issues that were problems in interpersonal relationships. In a recent study, problems were generalized into broader categories such as role expectations, envy, affectional support, etc., however, these problems were ones that developed in individual older adults and not in older couples as a whole (Fisher, Reid, & Melendez, 1989). Zietlow and Sillars (1988) used what they classified as the eight typical sources of conflict as discussion triggers in analyzing conflict resolution patterns, but they did not differentiate which sources were the most common reasons for conflict in older couple marriages. Overall, elderly couples had fewer salient problems than other life stage couples.

It appears one common source of conflict in retired couples was the division of labor in household duties. Prior to retirement, women may have been responsible for household chores. After retirement, when both individuals find themselves at home, the division of labor may become less clear. Consequently, conflict may ensue. Brubaker and Kinsel (1985) claimed that "young-old" shared more responsibilities than has been found in studies of younger aged persons. Even though many of the tasks were gender specific, they did start to share a great many of the tasks. Because conflict is often the result of power distribution, conflicts related to household tasks in long-term marriages may be caused by the struggle involved in the redistribution of chores. Wives may no longer feel responsible for all of the homemaking tasks such as cleaning, cooking, or shopping and expect husbands to help. Hence, adjustments have to be made regarding the division of labor, the sharing of space, and the way in which chores are completed.

Theoretical Frameworks

Life course perspective

Some scholars argued there was too much variation within and across families over time to focus on the larger family unit. So by the 1970's, an interdisciplinary approach called the life course perspective allowed family researchers to focus specifically on the developmental changes of the individual. An integration of life-span psychology, family history, and demography were the cornerstones of the perspective. Elder (1974), in his landmark study on individuals growing up during the Great Depression, discovered that the timing of events in one's life was largely influenced by the historical context. This study was recognized as a catalyst in the development of life course perspectives. The major principle underlying the perspective is understanding that the life trajectory of an individual life is greatly dependent on appreciating the social and historical factors as well. The life

course perspective links the three metrics of individual time, social (family) time, and historical time (Aldous, 1990).

Although life course perspective focus on age-graded, socially accepted sequences of life events and transitions, the view of developmental change within the life span is not a static picture. The cumulative nature of the total life experience is revealed, and past life experiences are understood to be very relevant and salient influences to the experiences of the present (Allen & Pickett, 1987). In other words, the past bears strikingly upon the present. Historical influences allow the researcher to appreciate the multiple dimensions of time that impinge upon the lives of individuals and their marriages.

The life course perspective, recently adopted by gerontologists and family sociologists, suggests that the process of aging can only be understood with reference to the entire life course. The analysis requires a dynamic, longitudinal perspective. However, the notion of the marital life course has been relatively underdeveloped, particularly as it applies to long-term married couples (South & Spitze, 1986). Therefore, to understand marriages and their paths throughout the life course more fully, researchers need to consider that different functions are served at different life stages. Moreover, the historical context and the timing of certain life events may indicate why particular problems or conflicts occur within the marriage.

Symbolic interaction

Symbolic interaction has been a major theory in the study of marriages and is a common approach in qualitative research. Blumer (1969) first coined the term "symbolic interaction" and argued for three central principles: 1) human beings act toward things on the basis of meaning that things have for them, 2) the attribution of meaning to objects through symbols is a continuous process, 3) meaning attribution is a product of social

interaction in human society. Symbols are signs, language, gestures or anything that communicates some type of meaning, and meanings are constructed through social interaction. More specifically, symbolic interaction is a framework for understanding how people, in tandem with one another, create symbolic worlds and how these worlds, manipulate human behavior (Stephen, 1984).

A central concern for researchers studying marriages and marital interaction within the symbolic interactionist framework is understanding the symbolic environments that influence the couple's behavior (Stephen, 1984). A couple's behavior may be more readily understood by studying the meanings a couple shares and the symbolic processes and rituals they perform. Throughout the course of marriage, couples generate a microreality consisting of shared meanings and a shared construction of the history of their married life. This microreality includes the identities, negotiated roles, and social patterns expected within the marital interaction. Over the course of the relationship, past experiences may give shape and form to the present relationship, but interestingly, the present relationship may conversely play a role in reconstructing past experiences. The marriage relationship and the quality of the relationship dramatically affect how spouses think and feel about themselves. Hence, it is interesting to learn how each marital partner constructs the highs and lows of his/her marriage over the life course, and what conflicts or problems stand out as shared realities.

Thus, the life course perspective and symbolic interaction lay the groundwork for a qualitative, life span study of long-term marriage conflict and resolution styles. In this study, the goal was not only to identify what conflict plagues a 50 year marriage, but also, how certain life events and cohort effects contribute to periods of conflict throughout the marital career. In order to do this, spouses needed to first identify salient life events within the marriage and how those particular events either precipitated fewer or more problems.

By asking couples to examine their marital career, not only are the conflicts of the present day recalled, but the conflicts of the past are also reviewed. In addition, a life course perspective allows marital conflict to be evaluated from a historical context.

Symbolic interaction creates the understanding that marital conflict has been mutually created and negotiated by both partners over the life span. According to the theory, events and conflicts of the past cumulatively affect the shared perceptions of the present relationship. In addition, through constant negotiation and experiences, couples adapt to prescribed roles and behaviors. Thus, over the life course, both partners have co-constructed their vision of the rules, problems, and quality of the marriage.

Hence, the premises of life course perspective and symbolic interaction drive the following research questions: 1) During the span of a long-term marriage, which periods of marriage precipitated more conflict? 2) Over the long-term marriage, what types of conflicts surfaced? Were these conflict sources persistent throughout the marriage or concentrated in particular time spans? 3) How do the conflicts of the present time period differ from those in the past? Are the conflicts more or less salient than those before? 4) How has conflict been managed throughout the course of the marriage? 5) Are there differences in how men and women perceive the conflict in their marriage and how was it managed?

Additionally, there are several research questions that attempt to address how couples describe the enduring nature and qualities of the long-term relationship. 6) What traits or characteristics need to exist to maintain a long-term relationship? 7) Was divorce ever an option for either partner and how were difficulties negotiated? 8) What outside influences such as family, religion, or economics helped or hindered the relationship?

METHOD

The methodological approach taken to study long-term marriages combined the theoretical perspectives of the life course and symbolic interaction with a qualitative research technique called retrospective interviewing. Researchers who operate using a qualitative paradigm attempt to explain naturally occurring events, actions, and interactions within a specific context from the perspective of the participants involved. By examining a few cases very intensively, researchers can seek universal principles or themes and may gain a holistic understanding of phenomena (Moon, Dillon, & Sprenkle, 1990). Quantitative strategies are useful in explaining marriage trends and patterns of the previous decade, but interviewing older people about their marriages provides a firsthand description of events without researchers having to observe them directly (Allen & Pickett, 1987). In addition, the use of qualitative data yields themes and patterns that are often overlooked in secondary analyses. Although research questions are developed to focus the collection of qualitative data and to help frame the subsequent analysis, questions may change during the course of the study. Comparatively, qualitative designs are much more flexible and fluid than most quantitative designs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Flexibility is essential to the exploratory, discovery orientation of qualitative research. Despite the fluidness in the research design, there are indicators of rigor unique to qualitative methodology to ensure both credible and useful research findings.

Prior to this study, a pilot study of ten couples married for 40 or more years was conducted. In the pilot study, similar research questions regarding the sources conflict and conflict resolution strategies in long-term marriages were explored. In addition, a qualitative research design was used which included interviewing techniques and content analysis.

Sample

In qualitative studies, relatively flexible sampling procedures are used in informant selection. Informants chosen for a study are rarely selected through probabilistic sampling, but through purposive sampling. The investigator creates relevant criteria for the desired informants often based upon their unique experiences or specific characteristics (Brotherson, 1990). Because the intent of qualitative designs is to focus on generalization to theory rather than generalization to populations, this type of sampling procedure is appropriate (Moon et al., 1990). The criteria for the sample in this study included couples married for 50 or more years, living independently in their own home, with no children presently living at home, and in stable enough health to be interviewed and participate actively in an approximately 45-minute-to-an-hour interview.

Since the design of qualitative research is very flexible, typically the number of participants is not decided beforehand. What becomes important during the research process is the ability of each interview to aid the researcher in developing theoretical insights in the area of the social interaction being studied (Taylor, 1984). Each interview is intended to vary from the next and add to the range of perspectives held by the particular sample. Thus, because the goal of the research is to gain an in-depth understanding about the range of marital experiences within the sample, once the information obtained through interviews begins to yield no new or unique insights, the point of saturation has been obtained. The saturation point for this study was 15 couples.

Over the past year, 50th anniversary notices were clipped from the Des Moines Sunday Register. Each Sunday the central Iowa newspaper listed anniversaries of Iowan couples who had been married at least 50 years or more. Either the couple or a family member filled out a form with the pertinent details surrounding the anniversary, and returned the form by mail to the newspaper by the Tuesday before the next Sunday

publication. The notices listed the names and addresses of couples who were celebrating 50 or more years of marriage. The couples specifically chosen for the study were taken from a collection of golden wedding anniversary announcements and were residents living in central Iowa. Couples were sent an informational letter detailing the objectives and procedures of the study and a request for their participation. One week following the receipt of the letter, couples were contacted by telephone and were asked to participate in the study. Interview times were scheduled at this time. Prior to each interview, couples signed a consent form agreeing to participate in the study. Spouses signed an additional consent form authorizing the researcher to audio tape the interview. The consent form indicated informants' first names would be used within the summary of interview data. However due to the personal nature of the data and to ensure confidentiality, first names were changed after the data had been reviewed. When reading the data, couples can be determined as the first letters of both names match. Interviews were audio taped and conducted by the researcher at the homes of the informants.

Interestingly, the informants were very difficult to secure. Originally, 50 letters were sent out to golden wedding anniversary couples. Out of the 50 couples contacted only eight couples agreed to be interviewed. Some couples expressed a concern of privacy, and several individuals pointedly stated their marriage was none of the researcher's "business." Moreover, security and safety factors could have been a reason for not agreeing to allow a stranger into their homes. Because of the low participation, a second set of 25 letters was sent out which only secured an additional four couples. The final three couples were obtained through word of mouth.

Data Collection

To describe the sample more accurately, couples were asked to answer several survey type questions regarding demographics such as age, sex, number of years married, number of children, and current health status. Additionally, the participants were asked to answer a one-item indicator of marital satisfaction: "Taking all things together, how would you describe your marriage?" (from 1 = very unhappy, to 7 = very happy). The results of these measures are reported using central tendency statistics.

The average age of the women in the study was 72.9 years, and the average age of men was 75.2 years. The couples within the study were married on the average of 51 years. Couples reported having a mean of 4.4 children. Overall, health ratings were quite good. On a five point scale (from 1 = poor, to 5 = good), the sample stated their health rating was approximately a 4. Separately, wives reported a health rating of 4, and husbands also reported a rating of 4. When couples were asked about their marital happiness on a 7 point scale, the mean was 6.3. Wives reported a happiness rating of 6.3, and husbands reported a slightly higher mean of 6.35.

All of the couples resided in a 25 mile radiance of the Des Moines area. With the exception of one couple, all lived in homes they owned. The homes were modest, relatively small, and had been their place of residence for approximately 25 or more years. The majority of husbands interviewed worked in blue-collar oriented jobs. Their occupations included: farmer, assembly line worker, carpenter, airline worker, state government worker, lawyer, and dentist. Wives worked in part-time careers when their children were small, but developed other types of professions during midlife including: teaching, secretarial work, food service, real estate, and childcare. Aside from one couple, participants' economic status appeared to fall within a middle to upper-middle income level.

To answer the other research questions, a multimethod qualitative approach was used. Previously, a major portion of gerontological data has been either gathered through a cross sectional or a longitudinal study (Back & Bourque, 1970). Both methods have drawbacks. First, although cross sectional data seems to give a total picture for different age groups at one point in time, it is difficult to ascertain if the differences are due to cohort differences or developmental differences (Back & Bourque, 1970). Second, although longitudinal data allows the researcher to understand developmental changes of a particular cohort, longitudinal studies are costly, time consuming, and typically only one cohort is sampled (Back & Bourque, 1970). Moreover, what becomes more problematic in the study of marriage is that there are no broad scope longitudinal studies that have followed married couples over the life span beyond the 20 year mark of marriage (Lee, 1988). Consequently, qualitative techniques, such as retrospective interviewing and life span charts, that use the qualities of longitudinal data, were employed.

Qualitative designs are often criticized for the lack of rigor in testing the validity and reliability of the data. However, qualitative researchers have designed particular strategies that allow the researcher to maintain accountability. Lincoln and Guba (1982) outline four inter-related categories of rigor: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. First, credibility attempts to match the realities of the respondents with that of the investigator. The concept of credibility is closely related to validity. The researcher tries to ensure that what is measured is what was intended to be measured. Credibility can be maintained through the technique of triangulation and the use of probing questions. Triangulation is a strategy that is helpful in establishing rigor in all four categories. It is the process of cross checking data and interpretations by comparing a variety of data sources, different perspectives, and different methods against one another (Guba, 1981). Information is not accepted unless it can be verified by at least two sources. Credibility is

additionally accomplished by asking probing questions during the course of the interview. Probing allows the researcher to clarify and cross check the information he/she has collected.

The indicator of transferability is similar to the concept of generalizability. The data should be documented thoroughly so others can make decisions about the fittingness of data to other contexts (Brotherson, 1990). Transferability can be achieved in two ways. First, by selecting a purposive sample, the researcher will be able to maximize the depth and breadth of the phenomenon being studied. Next, by collecting detailed transcripts, the researcher is supplied with a rich and explicit picture of the informants and their immediate context.

The indicator of dependability addresses the stability and consistency of the data (Brotherson, 1990). Dependability is like the concept of reliability. Again, the strategy of triangulation can be used to achieve dependability. Multimethods of qualitative techniques can be used in tandem to ensure that similar information is being gathered and verified (Guba, 1981). The goal of a multimethod approach is to compensate for the strengths and weaknesses in various methods. In addition to triangulation, the researcher can document the procedure of the study in an audit trail. The audit trail serves to track the procedures and protocol of the study as well as the perspectives or biases of the researcher. It may simply take the form of an investigator's daily journal.

Finally, confirmability is the last indicator of rigor in qualitative designs. Confirmability seeks to examine the data and establish that the reported product is rooted in the respondents' true perceptions. As with the other indicators, triangulation can be used to validate that what is being reported is found repeatedly by the use of multimethods. Confirmability also is accomplished by having the product reviewed by an outside auditor

(Brotherson, 1990). The researcher can have the manuscript peer reviewed and critiqued for consistency and validity.

By using a combination of life graphs and interviewing, the researcher was able to obtain a collection of rich data that details the marital experience of older adults unique to their specific context which adhere to the indicators of rigor. The multimethod approaches of the life graph and interviews allowed the researcher to achieve triangulation. In addition, the life graph served as a helpful memory device during the life history interview. Again, to ensure multisource data, partners were interviewed separately so that their answers did not influence those of their spouses. Moreover, separate interviews afforded the researcher the opportunity to cross check the data and examine marriage and conflict from the perspective of both men and women. Finally, throughout the entire interview process, the researcher took field notes and kept an audit trail of the procedures, observations, and perspectives she found relevant.

First, participants were asked to represent their marriage on a life graph. The life graph is supposed to be a good tool to view life events, specifically conflict, within the framework of the individual's life span (Martin, 1985). The technique asked informants to draw their marital life as they see it, with its characteristic dips, peaks, and plateaus (Back & Bourque, 1970). The graph indicated conflict frequencies or severity and its ups and downs from the couple's wedding day to present. The horizontal axis of the graph was divided to represent every five years of their marriage. The vertical axis of the graph indicated the "amount of conflict" from 1/8 inch to 8 inches (Back & Bourque, 1970). The higher the number of conflicts, the higher the vertical axis. While the participant drew his/her graph, the interviewer asked about the change in the conflict during the periods indicated, and documented the various life events that made those periods of marriage more tumultuous.

The life graph worked relatively well as a method to mark significant life events and to put the spouse's life into perspective. It became difficult for informants to remember years specifically, however. Instead, respondents gave answers that responded to sets of years. Informants had more ease in identifying events early in their marriages and events following retirements. In addition, respondents viewed marital conflict as a whole rather than as particular to different periods of life.

Next, participants were asked to individually "free list" common life events or conflicts throughout their marriage. Free listing is simply a procedure that allows the respondent the freedom to list the salient events or conflicts during different stages of life as well as the present. Hurwicz, Durham, Boyd-Davis, Gatz, and Bengston (1992) suggested that the method was valid as they found that the events respondents listed in their study were consistent with the events documented in the current literature at each life stage. Conflicts were defined as "any conflict of interest or situation wherein what one of you wants is at odds with what the other wants. These include disagreements, such as spats, squabbles, arguments, fights, and conflicts" (Lloyd, 1990, p.267). In addition to life events, they were asked to list common conflicts of the current period. Free listing was advantageous in studying life events as it allows the researcher to understand the inter-individual differences between people. The researcher began to understand what people of various stages really experience as having impact on their lives (Hurwicz et al., 1992).

Finally, a retrospective interview was conducted to gather information about marital conflict and endurance throughout the life span. Interviewing as a technique to gather information has had a long history in the social sciences. Charles Booth is credited as one of the first to use interviewing as a tool for developing a social survey. In 1886, he developed a comprehensive survey to investigate the social and economic conditions of the people of London that was later published as *Life and Labour of the People in London*

(1902-1903) (Fontana and Frey, 1994). Other social scientists eventually followed Booth's lead including American sociologist W.E.B. DuBois who studied the Black population of Philadelphia in 1896. Although the use of the survey has dominated much of the social science literature, feminists and postmodernists have begun to argue for the potential of interviews to focus on the voices, feelings, and individual differences of respondents.

Interviewing is one of the most powerful ways to understand the human experience from the participant's point of view. The researcher relies on verbal accounts to learn more about social interaction and life. There are two general types of interviews that use very different formats to get at the desired information. First, structured interviewing is often used in research tools such as attitude surveys, opinion polling, and questionnaires (Taylor, 1984). Each subject is asked specific questions in a standardized format. People may be asked to rate their feelings or attitudes on a scale, or select the most appropriate answer to a set of questions. In contrast, qualitative or unstructured interviewing is very nondirective and often requires an open-ended format. The interview is conducted face to face and the overarching purpose is to understand informants' perspectives of their life, their experiences, and their life events expressed in their own words (Taylor, 1984). Generally, unstructured interviewing provides the researcher with a greater depth and breadth of information than structured interviews (Fontana and Frey, 1994).

A specific type of qualitative interviewing that was utilized in this study is called life history. Life histories are the oral collection of the accounts of one's life over the life span. A life history allows the researcher to capture the important experiences of a person's life and his/her perceptions about those experiences (Taylor, 1984). Admittedly, the oral accounts are partial views shaped and influenced by the individual's life opportunities, constraints, and his/her personal construction of the purpose of life. Because life histories

detail the external facts of an individual's life and take on a longitudinal form, researchers gain the opportunity to answer questions about continuity and change (Bellaby, 1991). The past events and sociological processes of one's life may help illuminate the present, and serve as a chronology of the interactions between individual, social, and institutional structures (Dex, 1991).

Participants were asked to explain how marital conflicts have typically been resolved, what conflicts were most severe and why, whether the saliency of marital conflicts changed throughout time, and what conflicts may have been turning points during the course of the marriage. As the interviews were collected, other types of information evolved as a central theme. Many respondents described their beliefs about what makes a marriage work over a 50 year period, which included not only information about conflicts, but qualities, rules, and attitudes that support an enduring relationship. Retrospective researchers contend that remembering significant life events is not difficult for participants, and researchers are given the luxury of having a "longitudinal like" study for significantly less money (Martin, 1985). The interview data in this study provided very rich, qualitative experiences that helped explain further what makes a 50 year old marriage survive.

Analysis

The demographic characteristics such as age, number of years married, number of children, etc., obtained from the survey questions were computed using descriptive statistics to understand the central tendencies of the research sample. Frequencies of conflict sources were also noted.

The majority of the data was analyzed using qualitative methods. The process is employed to reduce data from intensive interviews in a way that it becomes distilled to its essentials (Tesch, 1987). The interview data were transcribed and content analyzed in

terms of salient life events, marital views, conflict commonalities, resolution styles, and qualities of the long-term marriage. Common themes and domains were identified as components of conflict and endurance in long term marriages.

Specifically, certain steps were used to develop an organizing system of the data. First, the transcriptions of the unstructured interviews were read over carefully several times to get a sense of the data as a whole. Next, the documents were reread and emerging topics or themes were noted within the margins. After the documents were read and marked for topics, general categories, similarities in topics, and differences were assembled, and information that seemed to have commonalities was clustered. The process was much like the conceptual rationale of factor analysis, but the clustering was done with qualitative data and required logic to think through the meanings and interpretations of the information rather than to statistically categorize information. The interview documents underwent several readings and categories were refined until a general organizing structure was accomplished. The content of each category was identified and summarized. Dialogue was recoded into more fitting and specific categories throughout the process. The finalized organizing structure was a higher-level synthesis and consisted of the substance of the domains that were used to make generalizations about the respondents and their experiences (Tesch, 1987). After the data were categorized and to ensure consistency in the interpretation of dialogue, an outside auditor read and rechecked the interpretations.

RESULTS

The interview data from husbands and wives yielded four major themes. The first theme that emerged was each individual's account of major life events. The events detailed by couples were significant to the relationship and were both positive and negative in nature. Interestingly, women and men recalled most events similarly, but sometimes remembered events as they pertained to their marital roles. The second theme to develop was the frequency of conflict within the marriage and how conflict was managed within the relationship. Although couples independently expressed their perceptions of conflict, their dialogues were remarkably alike. A third and related theme was the discussion of various marital issues that have the potential to precipitate conflict within a marriage. Spouses recalled what specific issues were conflictual for their own marriages and how these issues were managed. Finally, the fourth theme discussed by partners was their views and beliefs about what makes a 50 year old marriage work. This discussion involved general views about maintaining a long lasting marriage, a description of the partner's qualities, the role of communication, and each partner's thoughts about divorce.

Life Events

Long-term married couples were asked to recall life events they considered to be significant or important. The reviewing of life events gave respondents an opportunity to reflect over their married lives and try to piece together the years into a cohesive whole. Remembering the actual dates of certain life events was difficult for some. However, for the most part, individuals could recall their married lives in a temporal sequence and highlighted those events they found to be significant, life changing, positive, and even

difficult. Interestingly, although major events such as births, anniversaries, and moves were typically recalled by both spouses, sometimes husbands and wives recalled different events as life markers. The significant life events remembered by individuals seemed to correspond most with their specific roles within the marriage as either caretaker or breadwinner. Wives' perspectives were affected by their roles as mother and recalled events in relation to their children. On the contrary, husbands recalled their lives as it corresponded to their careers.

I worked for the contractors for nine years. Then I worked for the state for 14. I worked for them for about 10 years and I had a promotion into management. The last four years I was supervisor. That was kind of an event, nothing great, but you know. After I retired, I done a lot of work, but just here and there, odd jobs. (Harry)

Most respondents could describe their first meetings and courtships in detail. For several of the couples, their courtships averaged between 1 and 3 years. For many, the couples' friendships had begun early as they knew each other either in high school or had lived near one another.

We dated a long, long, long time. In fact, when I started dating her, I didn't even have a driver's license. But one thing in our lives that was really cute, at the time I started going with Betty, she only lived 2 1/2 miles from me, but we'd never met. Before we went to high school, we'd never met. (Bennie)

We lived around each other when we were younger and didn't even realize it. I was only 16 when we met. He was 17 or 18. He was a farm boy yet, he left home at 13 and became a hired hand. I don't know, we just started dating. I don't think we ever broke up. (Frances)

You know we have known each other since I was 13. We was going to the same church and the same Sunday school. (Nancy)

Several of the couples met because of circumstances related to the war. World War II affected much of the early years of their lives and was the impetus for their meetings as well.

We dated for a long, long time because he went into the service. He was at sea for four and a half years. Course I wasn't the only one. But there weren't many left in captivity, there weren't many men around. But we wrote every day and he stayed

in Hawaii and I wanted to go over, but my mother said, no. Little girls don't do that. (Charlotte)

Because of the cohort of the individuals within the study, the war and the end of the war were obviously significant events in their married lives. The war interrupted many of the couples' first years of marriage. Children were born while fathers were away, wives moved to follow their husbands, and for many, while their husbands were gone, wives were left to make lives for themselves until their husbands returned.

We were married for just a short time and I went into the service. I was gone three years and three months out of that. (Richard)

I followed him as soon as I could, but he was in the cadet program. He never got any leaves to speak of, maybe just an overnight leave. And sometimes, they sent him out on what they call a bivouac for eight weeks. I never saw him. And I was in a strange town, so this was kind of tough. (Rose)

When he came home from the service and when he came home on furlough when he was in the service were really nice times. (Evelyn)

Births were clearly a high point for both husbands and wives. Individuals mentioned the births of their children as the first life event of significance. This may be true because chronologically the birth of children was the first event to happen within a marriage; however, children also seemed to be at the center of their marriage and their lives.

We married in '45 in June. Then our first daughter was born in '46, second one in '47, and third one in '49, and the fourth one was born in '55. I thought I had it made. (Avis)

All right, Diane was the first one, that's June the 26th in '46. Linda, I'm not too sure about her, it was April the 11th. She can tell you the year. And my boy, I can't tell you the year, but his birthday is in April. (Frank)

Although both partners recalled births with some accuracy, only women spoke of miscarriages. Yet, as mentioned before, wives had a tendency to frame their lives in relation to their role as mother. Thus, from the wives' perspective, a miscarriage would be a significant event worth noting.

Let's see, the first 13 years of our life we had five children and I had two miscarriages during that time. (Lydia)

We were married seven years before we had our first child. Then we were married nine years before our second, and 11 years before our third. And then we had a fourth child that died at the age of two days old and a couple of miscarriages in there after that one. (Gertrude)

Couples recalled time with their children as periods of significance. These times were remembered fondly and were considered the high points of their marriage. Several individuals listed family vacations, camping trips, and family celebrations as highlights.

These were the really good times. Our trips. When the kids were home, we'd go up to Minnesota for a week. We still laugh about them. We had old cars, load them up, and away we'd go. They were the high points. (Rose)

Well, we didn't have much money and too good of cars, but we'd go, like the Fourth of July on a picnic with all our relatives. We all got together at Christmas and our birthdays. They were always fun times. (Harry)

We did a lot of tent camping when the kids were little and went to the Tetons. That was probably our biggest event and happiest event, Teton Park, Teton Mountains, and Teton Lake. (Evelyn)

Not only were family celebrations considered major events, but couples often mentioned anniversaries and particularly Silver and Golden Wedding Anniversaries as high points of the marriage. These events were recalled with great fondness and again the element of family was important.

We had a big highlight on our 40th anniversary our children gave us. And of course, the big one at 50. All of the children were here as well as some of my relatives from the East Coast. (Gertrude)

Our 50th anniversary party was a big event. We've got a video and everything and tons of pictures. It was the happiest day of our life. (Frances)

I feel so blessed. We just celebrated our 50th and we had these people from England. I had my whole family and my bridesmaids from England. They came. All three of them came plus another cousin so there were four, plus one of their husbands. We had five of them from England, and we had all a good time. We had this big party down at Younkers tea room. All my kids got busy and gave us a really nice party. (Gladys)

When individuals recalled their lives together, moves from one home to another and building or purchasing a home were considered major life events. Although many of the couples still reside in homes they purchased between 20 and 45 years ago, a few of the

couples have moved to more manageable housing arrangements such as townhouses and apartments. Those couples who have moved to smaller residences noted that the adjustment had been difficult and many times they longed for their old homes. One woman sadly explained she had been recently treated for depression because she had found the move to their new condominium to be so difficult.

After we moved here, that was one of the hard parts. We agreed we wanted to buy this place, but we just looked at it once and it was a night... after we got moved in here, I thought what we had done. I was really upset for a long time, and in fact, I was in the hospital for awhile last summer. (Evelyn)

We lived over in Saylorville and we had a five bedroom home which you needed for children. For our anniversary party, if we would have had a house we could accommodate so many people. This way we had to put them in a motel across the street. It was different to move up here. I really didn't like the place either when we first moved. I thought to myself you come in that door and shut that door. I was used to opening my front door and looking into my yard and looking at my flowers. (Gladys)

Although many of the couples revealed the happier times in their lives as life events, difficult times like illnesses and death also marked their marriages. Individuals were particularly struck by the loss of their parents, children, and siblings even after a number of years had passed.

When my mother died, it was another bad time for me because she was too good. She was such a loving person, but you can't have any say over when people die, do you? (Charlotte)

We used to visit her dad all the time in Nebraska. He passed away in '56. My father and mother both died in '79. Two months apart. They had been divorced many years and then they died two months apart. (Ivan)

Illnesses experienced by children were often detailed despite the number of years that had passed. The illnesses recalled were not minor ailments like the flu or colds, but were major incidents often requiring extended stays at the hospital. The strain and stress of a child's illness seemed to take its toll on the couple both financially and emotionally. One man began to get tears in his eyes as he solemnly recalled his son's illness and extended stay in the hospital.

I guess one thing that turned me around was my son, oldest son. I think he must have been 10 years old at the time when he had mold on his lungs and we almost lost him. (Mac)

The first eight weeks we had her home and she got some kind of virus and we had to put her in the hospital. Course I was working out of town, felt bad about it. The wife had to be here going through all of that, so I asked the company to bring me back to town so I could be in the hospital at nights, sitting with her, and give my wife a break, come home and sleep, and then I'd go to work the next day, and go back there the next night. I don't know how long she was in the hospital. (Frank)

For many of the spouses, their partner's decline in health was a significant event.

Typically, the illnesses revealed were very serious and potentially life-altering experiences.

A partner's poor health had generally occurred in the later years of their marriage.

Although some wives had reported breast cancer or depression, most of the illnesses reported were related to their husband's health. Moreover, for several of the couples, the illness marked a change in their marriages for the years to come.

In '65 or '66 I guess, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's. (Jacqueline)

A major event was five years ago. My husband had five by-passes. And we almost lost him. And then a year later, he had a bleeding ulcer, and we almost lost him again. They were the most tragic things in our marriage. (Gertrude)

Now since he's been sick, he gets grumpy and I understand why he gets grumpy. We have both been so active, before this (stroke) happened. We even walked two miles a day, and all of a sudden, overnight this happened. Well, we do a lot of crying, cause when he cries, then I have to cry too and vice versa. This has been hard on us these last five months. But we'll get through it. (Nancy)

The recalling of life events created a longitudinal look at the lives and marriages of both husbands and wives. As noted previously, the particular life patterns and significant events remembered were fairly consistent from one couple to the next. Moreover, the retelling of life events also helped put into perspective the historical influences and societal attitudes that affected and molded the lives of these long-term couples.

Conflict

As with any interpersonal relationship, conflict becomes an inevitable factor. Clearly, the marital relationship is a series of negotiations and discussions which creates the environment for potential differences. Therefore, it becomes especially interesting to understand how couples who have had marriages last over a half century manage conflict. The themes that emerged from these interview data were helpful in addressing research questions one, four, and five: 1) During the span of long-term marriage, which periods of marriage precipitated more conflict? 4) How has conflict been managed throughout the course of marriage? 5) Are there differences in how men and women perceive the conflict in their marriage and how was it managed?

Spouses were asked to recall the amount of conflict they had throughout the course of their marriage. Some individuals were reticent to discuss conflict; perhaps the disclosure was too personal. However, many of the respondents openly admitted conflict was unavoidable and "a marriage has to have conflict." Individuals not only discussed the frequency of conflict, but also revealed how they resolved conflict within the marriage. Over the entire 50 years of marriage, the majority of the individuals stated they seldom or sometimes had conflict. However, individuals noted specific life stages that yielded more problems. The child rearing years were times couples recalled as being more problematic. In addition, some individuals felt their arguments had increased following retirement primarily because they spent more time together. However, on the whole, both partners recalled how little they had experienced conflict throughout the duration of their marriages and could not specifically remember any substantial problems.

We really didn't have too much conflict. We agreed on most things. (Frank)

There was sometimes conflict, but I think as a general rule we got along together and never had any real fights. There was an argument once in a while. (Mac)

We had conflict sometimes. Didn't last that long. Soon as I could keep my mouth shut, we didn't have conflict. (Isabel)

Oh, we sometimes had conflict. It should have been seldom, because we don't have too many. Everybody has some. You can't help it. (Richard)

As couples relate to each other, rules about appropriate and inappropriate conflict behavior are co-created through the years and act as a guide for the marital relationship. Interestingly, several of the individuals mentioned particular rules they abided by when conflicts with their spouses arose.

I would say you need to first of all listen, and get both sides of the story. (Glenn)

We never, either one of us, would holler at each other. (Harry)

I've never had any violent arguments with my wife. My children have never heard us in an argument or fight. We made it our policy never to discuss anything in front of the children. (George)

The old saying "never go to bed mad" is advice freely given to married couples. A few of the individuals stated they followed this advice, and made a point of resolving the conflict with their partner before going to sleep. One woman claimed going to bed angry made her physically ill. On the contrary, others felt going to bed without resolution was sometimes a more practical method as individuals would have time and a good night's sleep to put the problem into proper perspective.

We never tried to go to bed without making up if we did have a little argument. There was never a time that one of us would be in another bed. Not once. We always went to bed together, and lots of times, if we did have a little argument, he would either say he was sorry, or I would say I was sorry that we had a little argument. (Nancy)

We don't go to sleep when we've had quarrels. That is settled before we go to sleep. I don't carry it over to the next day. I've learned that you tolerate the next person's point of view. (Lyle)

I can't say I've never gone to bed mad. It's a different thing in the morning, so it's like water over the dam. It's a different thing altogether. It takes time to cool down. (Bennie)

Sleep on it and in the morning it's gone. (Jacqueline)

Spouses discussed the triviality of issues and emphasized the need for couples to learn the difference between significant and insignificant issues. Getting past the conflict and not holding grudges were also recommended as ways to successfully manage conflict.

You can't take yourself too seriously and if it isn't a life or death matter, tomorrow it won't mean anything anyway. You need to have a sense of humor, that saves a lot of trouble. I think it is very important not to say things that are going to hurt and never bring up something that's past and has been settled. Forget it. (Jacqueline)

You've got to consider each other. You can't fly off for every damn little thing. You just can't or you could be in a dozen arguments every day. You don't have to get mad if you don't want to. Not that we don't get mad once in a while, but a couple hours is all. You got to give a little, you got to take a little. That's what it amounts to. (Harry)

Don't carry a grudge, if things bother you, just don't let it. Don't dwell on it. Just when it's over with, it's over with. Move on. (Ivan)

Although the frequency of conflict is often an indicator of the quality of marital relationships, it is how conflicts are managed that becomes the more relevant factor.

Spouses discussed how they personally dealt with conflict and how their partners handled conflict. For the majority, avoidance appeared to be the resolution strategy of choice. Avoidance strategies included simply not talking about the issue, withdrawing from the conflict, or giving in to their partner.

The best thing to do is to keep your mouth shut. You know, it'll blow over and you know, in a few hours, everybody forgets everything. (Arnold)

I think I give in to him...cause I don't like to fight and I take the easy way out. I don't like conflict. I try to keep peace in the family... Sometimes I get real silent and give the silent treatment. (Avis)

Usually I didn't say anything. I kept quiet. If there was something that upset me, I would not talk and then forget about it. (Jacqueline)

Even if we're angry about something, I'd go up in the other room for awhile. He'd go in the bathroom and comb his hair or something. When he came back out, I couldn't be mad at him. (Isabel)

Wives were more expressive and emotional during conflict. Communication became a central factor when dealing with conflict. Many of the women stated they wanted

to talk out the problem with their husbands and found it frustrating when their spouses did not reciprocate. Women were also more likely to admit to yelling or getting verbally aggressive during the course of conflict.

I scream a lot. I have a tendency to flare, because I'm not Irish for nothing. He's English, he'll raise his voice, which is good for me, so it's more or less healthy both ways. It irritates me sometimes when he doesn't flare, or doesn't say anything. (Charlotte)

I cried sometimes. Not on purpose, but I did because I always felt bad about it. We tried to talk things out. He is a very solemn person, a quiet person ordinarily, and it's kind of hard to drag things out. If we sit down and talk about it, we resolved it. I have a tendency to talk on and on and sometimes get it out of my system, where he doesn't. (Gertrude)

I have a habit of blowing my top which is not good because then things are said that I regret later. Dean is a person who has to delve into the reasoning of why of everything. So it's his way and my way. (Doreen)

Every once in a while I lose my temper and my kids always say, "Dad just sits there and doesn't say a word and you blow off steam"...I stomp around a lot and stew in my own juices. (Maude)

In addition, wives claimed to worry more over the outcome of the conflict. They expressed a need to have more in-depth discussions over problematic topics with their husbands. Some of the wives wished their husbands would worry more and take a more concerned attitude about their problems.

I am more of a worrier that he is and I'll worry more and talk about things and yak about things longer. I'll hold on to worries longer than he will. (Maude)

I know I have a tendency to worry a lot and I let it out. He probably worries but he keeps it bottled up which is bad sometimes. (Gertrude)

Ben doesn't really worry about things, you know. I think he kind of leaves it up to me. Sometimes I wish he'd really take ahold and think about some of these things, but I guess that's not unusual. I'd like it a little bit more the other way. (Betty)

Husbands agreed the avoidance of conflict was the best resolution style. They avoided the conflict most by physically removing themselves from the situation. However, after the conflict had dissipated, some husbands eventually took the time to discuss the issue with their spouse.

I just walk away and start doing something else, and then I come back and it's quieted down, and it's over with. (Richard)

A lot of times I just walked away. Just left her standing there. (Lyle)

Well, I avoid conflict as much as I can, but we usually end up talking about it then, just letting it blow over. (Frank)

A few of the men preferred a more logical approach when dealing with conflict. Yet, the logical approach was not always appreciated by their spouses. Husbands, unlike their wives, removed the emotional elements from the conflict and tried to understand the "whys of everything." Husbands believed a more rational approach allowed them to think through the issues more thoroughly and reasonably.

I like to be logical. I suppose that is typical. I guess maybe I think I'm an amateur lawyer or some fool thing, but I like to nail things down. If things prove out, that's the way I like them.. I would say the logic of the thing sometimes is not too important to her. (Dean)

I like to reason it out and discuss it and then try to work out a problem that might come up. It seems I take many things on by myself and made decisions by myself and she has accepted this. (Glenn)

I think I primarily get stubborn right away, until I think it over and reason it out. (Charlie)

When spouses were asked about changes in their conflict resolution styles over their marital careers, many individuals stated their resolution styles had generally remained the same. However, women felt they had become less reticent over the years. Now, they were more willing to openly confront problematic issues with their husbands. One woman related her change to the times. Although it is still somewhat culturally expected that women fulfill more submissive roles, in the current era, women have been given more liberty to assert themselves.

I talk back more now than I did. When we were growing up we were brought up as, he did this and that, and I took care of the house and children. After the girls left and I started getting out more, I started giving my own opinions as to what's going on. (Avis)

Before I'd be kind of careful maybe or do something else, but now I find if things aren't just right, I just say something. I'm much more verbal than I used to be. (Betty)

I didn't used to yell when I had kids. But now if something bothers me, I guess it's because I'm jittery lately, I'll yell some. (Isabel)

When spouses recalled the common conflicts they had over the course of their marriages, most of the problems amounted to trivial, mundane issues. Conflict areas ranged from child rearing to speeding. One man stated he and his wife had "conflicts about everything." Yet, most individuals claimed the disagreements within the marriage were over "just little things, that didn't amount to piddley." Clearly, the problems disclosed by spouses did cover a whole gamut of issues.

I ran across all these guys and I'd drink a little. Well, when I'd come home, there was friction. (Bennie)

She likes to throw things. My things. If I haven't wore something or used it in six months, it's no good to me. She wants to burn it or throw it away. I don't agree with that. (Richard)

Probably the main disagreement I have now is that my husband is untidy. He doesn't like to pick up... I have more arguments with my husband about picking up his clothes and being tidy. (Gladys)

He doesn't like the way I leave Kleenex around, and I don't like the way he leaves his handkerchiefs around. (Evelyn)

We have had lots of little problems, like I'm a terrible driver and I've got the car banged up quite a bit. It's banged up right now. And another thing, I like to stay up real late and read. Ben doesn't like to, he wants everybody to go to bed at a reasonable time. (Betty)

Resolving Marital Issues

Throughout a marriage, couples continuously work through an array of complex issues. Problems experienced in a marriage frequently call for compromise and possibly the adoption of new ideas, values, or beliefs. In the interviews, spouses outlined several pertinent issues that affected their marriages and their lives. This information addressed three of the following research questions. 2) Over the long-term marriage, what types of

conflicts surfaced? Were these conflict sources persistent throughout the marriage or concentrated in particular time spans? 3) How do the conflicts of the present time differ from those in the past? Are the conflicts more or less salient than those before? 8) What outside influences such as a family, religion, or economics helped or hindered the relationship? In many of the issues, there was great potential for conflict. However, for the most part, long-term couples discussed the hows and whys of their negotiation processes.

Religion

Religion is a sensitive issue involving deep values and long standing family traditions. It has the potential to break apart marriages, but can also be the cornerstone of marital and family life. Overwhelmingly, long-term married couples agreed to the strength faith had given them as individuals, and as a couple. The decision about religion and religious beliefs was made in the early years of marriage. Many of the married couples were not of the same faith prior to marriage, but one spouse had switched later to her/his spouse's religion. Although it appeared women were more likely to change to their husband's faith, it basically depended on whether spouses could accept the general teachings of the opposing church.

I was Presbyterian and he was Episcopalian. My dad always said it doesn't matter which one. Arnie seemed stronger as an Episcopalian than I was a Presbyterian, so that's where we went. (Avis)

We belong to the Lutheran church. My husband came from a very Baptist family and their differences in opinion on baptism and things were a little bit cause of friction in the beginning. I was adamant enough about it that I guess I made it known that it meant a lot to me. (Lydia)

My father and mother argued religion all the time, so I vowed when I got married that would not be a bone of contention. I became a Catholic and we both followed as near possible the rules and regulations. (Jacqueline)

Religion was a very important factor to the stability of long-term marriages. Most couples attended church regularly and made a point to incorporate religion into the lives of their children. Some couples claimed they never missed a Sunday service unless one of them was ill or out of town. Yet, wives were more likely to be faithful attenders than husbands. Wives had the duty of bringing the children to church. Only one couple labelled themselves as "nonreligious," but believed they shared similar values and morals. Many of the individuals believed that a deep faith was a key ingredient to their marital success.

When I get in a tiff, I just think of God. It helps me and it helps him. He mentioned it one day. He said if we didn't have our religion, I don't know what we would do. (Charlotte)

I would like to say that having Christian faith has really helped us through a lot of years being married. I mean you can always fall back on that, and I think that is pretty wonderful. (Gladys)

I think [religion] is quite important, really. I don't know how to explain it, but I think it is. Real important. (Harry)

Religion was not only important throughout the long-term marriage, but individuals became particularly more involved in church government, activities, and socials after retirement. A shared faith appeared to give couples a sense of connectedness and a group of mutual friends. Overall, long-term married couples reported the issue of religion as more of a solidifying force than a divisive one.

We belong to the Methodist church and we're very active in the church. We have been more active in these later years since I quit work and he's retired. (Gertrude)

We enjoy the time with our friends and the church. We have a lot of great friends that are connected with the church. I have been very active with the church for many, many years. I enjoyed singing in the choir. Gladys wouldn't sing in the choir, but our family has been strong. (Glenn)

Dean is very active in helping at church. He is on a Session and is very active with that. I have taught Sunday school and all those good things, but since he is more active now, I have backed off. I work in women's work, but don't teach Sunday school. (Doreen)

Money

Financial considerations can typically cause a great deal of friction and conflict within the boundaries of marriage. Each partner brings to the marriage their own personal spending habits and views about money. However, because this cohort of individuals had lived through the Depression, they were perhaps more conservative with their money. Couples indicated that privacy about monetary matters was an additional concern. One of the couples was hesitant about their involvement in the study because they did not want to be questioned about their finances. Yet, interestingly, this particular couple disclosed the most intimate details about their financial situation. Husbands and wives believed money caused the majority of problems in the early stages of marriage when children were being reared. Several individuals feared they would not have enough money to pay for groceries and day-to-day expenses. Retrospectively, the couples marvelled at their ability to survive financially those scarce years. The lack of money appeared to be more of a problem than how the money was managed.

Money was not so much a source of disagreement as an awful handicap a lot of times. I've seen the time when we would go into town to buy groceries we had to buy, and we had to put some of it back because we didn't have the cash on hand. (Mac)

We had some ups and downs. We had a few good years of farming and then, oh man, hogs were selling for 10 cents a pound, and it was really rough for awhile. And that was rough times. We were very poor and four kids. (Rose)

We watched dimes because of the fact that when we first got married... you don't have a lot of money. We used to write down every nickel we spent. Every week we would mark it down. If I bought a Coca Cola, that'd be one Coke, five cents. She got some hair pins, she'd put hair pins, five cents. We got down to the end of the week, we'd add all that up, and see whether we had spent more than we took in. If we did, we'd go back over it. OK, Arnie you cut out your Coke, and you cut out your hair pins, and balance the budget. (Arnold)

Individuals believed they went into the marriage with few financial expectations. Because of their own family backgrounds with little or no money, they were able to more adequately adjust to their current situations. The mentality of being frugal and living within their

means was a part of life. In fact, many respondents had difficulty departing from this mind set even into their retirements. A few husbands regretted they had not saved more over the course of the years.

I was brought up not expecting to have a lot, and so I've sort of grown into it.
(Avis)

Money was never an object. We both knew we were poor. He came from a poor family and my family wasn't rich, so we wasn't brought up rich.....Now, you know, I was poor, so he thinks, we shouldn't spend it for that, but it's not a disagreement, just something that we talk about. (Nancy)

I was not a well off girl when I met him, so I had learned to be fairly frugal.
(Maude)

Wives were more likely to manage the finances of the household. A few had bookkeeping backgrounds and took on the responsibility of creating budgets and paying bills.

Husbands were more likely to make investments. Husbands contended it was easier for their wives to take care of the money because of their work hours. In some cases, husbands and wives shared separate checking accounts. This was especially common if the wife worked part-time. "Her" money was put into a separate account for extras like trips or recreational items.

Bob made the money and I'm the one that pays all the bills.... I handled I think all of our finances. He used to give me so much at the beginning of the week for groceries and things. Then I gradually got independent and saved myself some every week. (Avis)

I let her do it because at that time the banks were closed on Saturdays.... She had time during the day to pay our bills off cause I couldn't do it when I was working.... I'll give her credit for being very wise in the spending of the money.
(Lyle)

She was a bookkeeper and if she keeps track and she wants to remember something she jots it down. I can count on her for all the dates and all the little things that come up she has recorded. She is very good at that. (George)

Money management seemed to be a task individuals fell into based upon the spending habits of their partner. Financial considerations were likely to be a concern throughout the marriage, but long-term couples seemed to decide somewhat early in the relationship what

habits were acceptable and not acceptable. Although most couples seemed to agree on spending and saving behaviors, a few individuals cited differences they had with their partners.

Well, if it's anything important, he takes care of it. I'm the spender. (Frances)

Ben was never good to get receipts and everything to me.... That when on for quite awhile until I decided this doesn't work, we're going to have to do something separate. So he starts banking and I start banking. (Betty)

He's a shopper, and I don't have to look at things for a long time before I decide. When we were poor, there was conflict about money. (Rose)

Decisions about major purchases were typically mutual decisions. One couple stated that if anything over \$100 was purchased usually both parties had talked about the purchase and agreed upon it. It was assumed both spouses would use their discretion when buying other items. One couple never charged anything. If they could not afford it, they would not buy it. However, occasionally, a husband made a major purchase without his wife's consent, and this caused a great deal of friction. Husbands talked about buying cars and homes without their wives' consent. Respondents recalled these times as major conflicts.

When we moved to Wichita, it was really hard. He called and said he had this house he thought we should buy. I said well, I want to see it, so wait until I come down. Well, when I got there he had already signed up for the house, and oh, that was really a big conflict. (Evelyn)

Well, I know he never bought anything big unless we agree on it. But this happened when he was ill. He wanted a new car. We didn't need a new car, but he wanted one, so he went out and got a new car. (Jacqueline)

Usually if it was very much money involved, and by that I mean \$100 or over, that was a lot of money and still is, but then it was discussed. There has never been a question over clothes. Dean just said, if you need it, get it. (Doreen)

Roles

Traditional roles and values permeated the lives of long-term married couples. Men were typically characterized as the breadwinners and did much of the outdoor work.

Women had the responsibilities of raising the children and doing the housework. Both men and women felt their roles were never negotiated, but rather expected. The roles enacted by spouses were very conventional and often very stereotypical, male and female roles. Clearly, there was a definite cohort effect illustrated by very prescribed gender roles. Women did not expect to have careers, and husbands were not expected to be involved in home maintenance or child rearing. Consequently, conflict surrounding the division of labor within the household was infrequent because couples were merely abiding by cultural standards of the time.

We come back from a different generation than you, and from our generation and on back, life was pretty well already patterned out, what a woman's place was in the world and what a man's place was. We still lived by that standard. (Lydia)

In the early years of my life, my wife never worked. I was a firm believer that a woman's place was running the house and the kids and taking care of all of that, and then a man's job was to get out and make a living. And we decided this when I was in Memphis, if I was going to get ahead, I had to work at it. (Arnold)

It was a foregone conclusion. My husband always did the outside work, the grass, the seeds, the planting. I always did everything in the house like the washing and ironing. (Gladys)

When a wife did take on a job outside the home, her work was considered part-time or secondary to her husband's career. Typically, wives would secure jobs that allowed them to be home before the children were out of school. Women did not work for the satisfaction of a career, but more so for the extra income. Only one of the women interviewed had a full-time teaching career that she had begun later in life only after negotiating with her husband for several years. Husbands were generally not supportive of their wives working outside the home. They believed they were the sole breadwinner, and wives should not have to work.

I never worked more than two or three hours a week. My kids never went to day care. (Jacqueline)

She worked eight hours a day in Younkers and then came home. She'd get the job where she could go in in the morning and get off early when the children came home. (George)

I said "I'm married to you and I'm the law of the family....You don't have to work, you take care of the house"....Then I got older and realized that she was really very good with kids. She should have been a teacher. (Bennie)

Since retirement, some couples have begun to shift in their designated work roles. Women expressed enjoyment in doing yard work and gardening. Men admitted to occasionally cooking meals or helping with the housework. However, wives contended they still did the majority of the work within the home. Husbands outwardly stated they avoided doing household tasks. In most cases, the sharing of work roles was the result of a partner's physical inability to do certain chores.

Since we have both retired, we share the work.... I have quite a bit of back and leg trouble and he runs the sweeper....We do the dishes together. And as I say, this is just recently. He still does the yard work. (Gertrude)

I never did anything outdoors until Ned had his first by-pass. Then I started mowing....He has never done laundry or anything like that.... If we want to do something during the day, he says he'll do the vacuum. (Nancy)

Now that we've retired, he runs the sweeper and he helps me with the dishes. He'll throw in a load of wash and cook a little bit. (Frances)

Children

Long-term married couples' lives revolved around their children. Life without children was hardly fathomable for all of the couples. Despite the fact their children were grown and gone, many of the couples spoke of frequent visits or talks with their children and grandchildren. Children and grandchildren were the joy of both the husbands' and wives' marriage.

To the pass the time we enjoy very much going to our kids and our grandchildren here in town and we do that at least once a week. We get in the car and go and see what they have been doing...just even if it is just an hour... Our kids are the up-most thoughts in our minds constantly.... Our lives are wrapped around our children. (Nancy)

Oh, (children) are very important. Very important. I think a marriage without children, just well, it just wouldn't be complete. (Gertrude)

Kids. That's it. That's life. If you don't have any children to think about, why I don't know how some of them do it, some of them don't have children. That's our life. (Bennie)

Children were very much appreciated and loved within the families. However, children were also the cause of conflict and differences. Some individuals believed the child rearing years fueled more periods of conflict.

There is more stress (with kids), you know, making money and raising the children. There's just more stress. There's a lot of stress when they all leave. When the first and last leave, it's hard. (Richard)

Husbands and wives occasionally disagreed on child rearing tactics. Disciplining the children was the most common conflict described by individuals. Parents were not always in agreement over what style of punishment was appropriate.

Not too often, now he'll correct the kids, which you know, he has spanked them. Now that's one thing, I do not. I never want him to spank and we'd get in to it. We'd get into a little spat about it. (Isabel)

I imagine the children caused a little more conflict. He's more easy going that I am. I was stricter. (Maude)

We had conflict about big things and little things. Disciplining the kids I suppose was a pretty big thing. (Eldon)

Wives were much more likely to have the responsibility of raising the children. Wives spent a great deal of time with their children and were the primary disciplinarians. Husbands spent what little time they could with their children after work, but relied and trusted their wives to enforce the rules.

I took care of the discipline and when he came home he could enjoy the kids without having to be the mean dad. (Jacqueline)

So me, being with the children all day, I'm the one that set the rules and enforced them. By the time he came home, I had dinner about ready and by the time everybody had eaten, everybody's in a pretty good mood. He used to play with the kids a lot, used to go out and go for rides in the evening and things like that. (Lydia)

I was the one who made the rules and they had to abide by them, and I was the one who had to do it. See they abided by them.... But on the whole, Dean and I probably talked about it and pretty much agreed. (Doreen)

He helped raise them, but I made them mind. Or tried to....We always agreed on that. I was the boss and he always agreed. (Hilda)

Making a living for their families was the major goal of fathers. However, when husbands recalled the time they spent with their children, some were regretful. Many wished they had balanced their careers more with their family. Husbands openly admitted spending too little time with their children. Although children benefited from a good life, fathers expressed a desire to redo the past.

Our lumber business was successful and everything. That's one thing I probably did in my life, I probably should have spent more time with my kids, but I was working 12,14 hours a day, whatever it took, you know. But they did receive the benefit out of it. (Arnold)

She did most of the raising, I'm sorry to say. If I had it to do over again, I'd never have three jobs or two jobs.... My family practically grew up without me. (George)

I guess one bad thing, and yet it wasn't bad for Dean, he worked rotating shifts at United Airlines and missed a lot of the kids growing up because of his working hours. (Doreen)

In-laws

Traditionally, in-laws are viewed as a point of contention. Stereotypically, they are portrayed as bothersome and interfering. However, this theme was not carried forward by the respondents. Perhaps some couples did not live near enough to their in-laws for them to be considered a bother, but the majority of long-term married couples expressed a genuine liking for their in-laws. Both husbands and wives stated they often viewed their spouse's parents as their own. Partners also talked about socializing with their spouse's siblings and enjoying the time they spent with them.

Sometimes families can cause a lot of problems. They weren't around so they didn't cause problems. His mother was a gem. She was a wonderful woman. And he loves my mother too. He did things for her that some son-in-laws wouldn't

have done. It was funny, she recognizes him more than she does me when we go to the home. (Jacqueline)

I thought, gee, how nice to marry a family that were all really nice people. They were all honest, good, hard-working. Just really nice people. I always felt lucky that I managed to pick the right guy that came from a nice family. (Maude)

I liked his mother so much. That's why we moved out here from Nebraska. I come back here to meet her, she was the motherly type I needed. (Isabel)

My brother was married to his sister, so we are doubly related. (Hilda)

In-laws often provided both emotional and financial support to the couples in the early years of their marriage. Especially during the war, wives relied on their in-laws for financial assistance and housing arrangements. In both situations, familial support did not appear to be an imposition, it was expected.

Eldon was in the service and I lived with my sister. My sister's husband was also in the service. We had five children under five. (Evelyn)

We moved from New York to Iowa. I was born in New York and raised there. For the first year (of marriage), we had to live with his grandfather and his aunt. (Maude)

We lived with his mother and his younger sister when we first married for about a year. (Avis)

Occasionally, in-laws provoked conflict, but not between spouses. The problems were primarily between one spouse and either the mother or father in-law. The problems occurred in the early to middle years of marriage and were typically described by spouses as minor. None of the conflicts were described as long standing feuds.

His mother used to come in every night, and we had only been married a year. We had never really been alone, we had always been with my folks...I didn't like her coming in every single night, but we never had conflicts... because I just didn't say anything. (Gertrude)

Sometimes she got angry with him, but I don't think he ever felt any anger toward her. I guess she was upset with the two last pregnancies. She didn't think I needed to have any more children. (Jacqueline)

Ben had a wonderful mother, but his father, he liked to have them done when he wanted things done, which wasn't always what he wanted to do. Yes, there was some, but I wouldn't say big conflicts, but there were conflicts, but not with his mother. (Betty)

I remember when I first came over here his mother wasn't very nice to me. She probably felt he shouldn't marry a foreign girl, but you know, we became real good friends and got along great. (Gladys)

Intimacy

Negotiating intimacy and how individuals express intimacy is a private, but common issue within marriages. Sexual expression is often very personal, especially with individuals in this cohort. Yet, surprisingly, a few of the respondents did discuss their sexual lives. Some spouses did not refer directly to physical intimacy, but talked about love and how love was expressed in their marriages.

The passionate love is there at first, but it grows, so that the passionate love is there at times. It grows into a stable love, a dependable love. (Doreen)

When it came to sex, we're from the old school, and I sound like a prude, I am not. Everybody likes to excite their husband...I do my best, but then we both enjoy sex. You can't be celibate. It's very important. Keep a man happy that way and I don't think you'd ever lose him. (Charlotte)

Tell each other that you love each other. We might say that three or four times a day to each other. Just even give him a kiss on the forehead and "I love you" and he says, "I love you too" and then you are on your merry way again. (Nancy)

Intimacy was particularly affected by a partner's health or illness. Although partners did not directly express frustration about changes in their sexual patterns, there was an implied concern. Since sexuality is such a private issue, the mere mentioning of a change, possibly indicated some hesitancy. When discussing sex, there was not a gender bias as both husbands and wives felt their intimacy had changed or had been interrupted.

Sex was never a problem. Well, the last 10 years has not been the best. (Jacqueline)

I suppose you could say our love life has changed. And I don't know why, it's probably age some, and of course, her being in surgery, but that doesn't bother me. It doesn't. (Frank)

His health didn't affect us. Although it does affect you sexually, when your mind isn't working right, so there was a period of time there. (Betty)

Later years

Events occurring in the later stages of marriage, such as health problems and retirement, can be causes of marital friction. These life changes may bring couples closer, experiencing a genuine sense of appreciation for their spouse. However, because these events can produce changes in roles and social patterns, the period of adjustment can be difficult. Couples discussed how changes in their partner's health and retirement affected their marriage.

Although most partners were sympathetic to their spouse's health problems, some expressed a negative change in their husband's or wife's demeanor. Spouses said that during the time of illness conflict arose more frequently. Some of the respondents stated the marriage had become difficult because their partners were "grouchy" or hard to get along with. Some individuals expressed a frustration to "get things right" for their partner. For a few of the couples, their partners recovered and their marriage returned to normal. Yet, for others, some of the spouses never regained their health and the negotiation to this new phase of life has been trying.

When his back started going bad and he was in so much pain, he was very difficult to live with. I told him if he hadn't had surgery, I don't know whether I could have tolerated it much more, he was just really grouchy. I couldn't do anything right.... I know he was in pain, but it was still hard. Those were hard times. (Rose)

Well, I think that we had very few conflicts until after he got sick, and I would say in these few years, we have had more conflict.... It is very hard for him to express himself and to make himself understood and if it's the least bit emotional, then he breaks down. His emotions are right at the surface with this disease.... We try, that's all we can do. (Jacqueline)

I guess medically I had a thyroidectomy... and that put a lot of stress on Dean because I was kind of hard to live with.... During that time I was a roommate in a sense. Somebody said it was like you cry all the time.... So it was kind of hard on him and on the kids. (Doreen)

I think something happened to her in recovery, I don't know. But it's either that or the medication she's on. I try to keep her happy, and that's why I got into this mess I'm in down here in Hickory Creek or Hickory Ridge, I don't know.... She's changed a lot since she's come out of recovery. (Frank)

Retirement is another period within the life cycle that changes individual lives and indeed, influences the marriage. Clearly, because of retirement, long-term couples indicated they spent much more time with their partner. This time of constant togetherness seemed to be more of an asset to the marital relationship than a deficit. Time together was spent travelling, doing hobbies, being involved in civic and church organizations, and visiting children and grandchildren. Some couples stated they felt closer to their partners and truly enjoyed spending more time with them.

I know we are a lot closer than we were before.... It's very seldom that one goes out without the other. He has certain meetings and I have certain meetings, but other than that, we go out together all the time. (Gertrude)

Oh, [retirement] didn't change our marriage, we just got to be together more, and otherwise it didn't change us. (Hilda)

You're together more, you have to understand each other more. (Charlie)

Well, we are together more in 24 hours a day, which I won't say caused any problems cause it is kind of nice to have him around all of the time, but too much sometimes. (Doreen)

A few of the couples explained that their lives had not changed due to retirement because husbands managed to still keep their schedules busy. Some wives contended their husbands "really hadn't retired at all." Perhaps, by keeping busy in hobbies and activities, husbands and wives found the adjustment to complete retirement less harsh.

We're used to changing over so many things in our lives, I don't think (retirement) bothered us. Charlie misses going and now he's finishing up his newsletter Tuesdays and Fridays and Saturday he works out at the country club. He has to be busy. He has to be with people. (Charlotte)

Well, things didn't change as much as I thought it would because he's got so many hobbies and so many things to do and actually, he really hasn't retired, he still works. And you know, a lot of them, when they retire, they're around a lot. (Avis)

Well, our marriage didn't change, not as much as a lot of people talked about and said we would really be in each other's way, but like I say, he belongs in lots of things. He goes a lot. (Betty)

The conflicts that did occur after retirement were a result of several changes. Wives complained their household chores and routines had been interrupted with their husbands spending more time at home. Some wives even stated that when husbands tried to help they became a nuisance and were in the way. Both husbands and wives commented about the negotiation of daily schedules. Sometimes spouses wanted their mates to participate in various activities or accompany them to certain events. However, when partners were resistant and did not want their schedules encroached upon, conflict ensued.

There is always a little conflict. We can't work in the kitchen together. We absolutely can't work together in the kitchen. So we have a kitchen in the basement. One of us usually goes to the basement to work. (Betty)

At the beginning, I couldn't do a lot of the housework with him around, I couldn't make up the bed or anything until he got out or something like that, but I mean we kept pretty much to our own, the same schedule we always had as far as when he retired, he ate a lot earlier than he did when he was working, but not that much. (Avis)

I was used to being a lot more on my own. I had a lot more time for me. I could do what I wanted and then I found he was always there. (Gladys)

Mostly she nags at me because I don't want to go places. I just want to sit and that's all right too. (Eldon)

Long-term married couples found ways to negotiate and adapt to the difficulties of marriage. However, this is not to say that marriages were conflict free. As illustrated, differences in beliefs and values often became points of contention. Still, many of their marital problems did not differ significantly from the problems of today. But, without question, the deeply ingrained gender roles of this cohort influenced marital conflict greatly. Much of the time, issues like child rearing and division of labor did not produce conflict as it might in contemporary culture. Frankly, these types of marital issues were not negotiable, but socially prescribed.

Keys to Longevity

As the statistics note, few marriages achieve golden wedding anniversary status. Those individuals who have lived long enough to be in 50 year marriages have definite perceptions about how to make marriages last. Through the course of the interview, husbands and wives expressed their ideas about the key ingredients to a long relationship. The following interview data were helpful in addressing this research question: 6) What traits or characteristics need to exist to maintain a long-term relationship? Long-term couples discussed values needed within a 50 year marriage, the influence of their family backgrounds, and the desirable qualities of their mates.

Characteristics of an enduring marriage

Long-term married couples attributed their longevity to a list of factors. Either respondents described particular words or phrases that contributed to their longevity, or they examined certain conditions that were present within their marriages. The following data contain respondents' perceptions about characteristics of an enduring marriage.

Respect. Overwhelmingly, the words respect, understanding, and tolerance were identified as key ingredients to a enduring marriage. Long-term couples reiterated time and time again the need for spouses to give and take. Spouses agreed that differences would arise throughout a marriage, and partners needed to learn to listen and be patient. Although spouses did not always share their partner's opinion, there was a strong belief that each person was entitled to his/her own viewpoint. One woman stated that she knew her husband was not going to change and the sooner she realized this and accepted his differences, then difficulties became easier to manage.

Be able to listen to each other and not jump too fast... but try to have patience and respect for the other person. Respect their feelings and their ideas.... But you are not going to change a person and if you don't like them, if there are some things

you don't like, you better think, is it good enough to live with or if you can't tolerate it, then don't marry him, because he isn't going to change. (Doreen)

Well, just have respect for the other person, you know, and they've got to have their ups and downs, and if they got the downs, well, just kind of back off. (Arnold)

One of the words would be tolerance. We don't always do what the other person likes, so I think tolerance is important. In other words, oral communication, I think that is important. (Dean)

Love. Many couples believed marriage was fundamentally based upon love. Love was described as not only a passionate type of love that involves a physical relationship, but a giving and lasting love. Some spouses contended that without love, the relationship could not survive. Love was the bond that held couples together despite differences. Love made spouses care about each other as well as the relationship. Surprisingly, more husbands mentioned love as a key ingredient to marital success than wives.

Love. It is kind of hard to describe in one word. I think that you have to think more about your spouse than you do yourself. Consider him more. I think you have to put them first and then yourself. (Gertrude)

A key to a 50 year relationship is I guess love. You have to be in love and be loved and I think that is it. (Gladys)

I suppose the [key] would have to be love. If you didn't love her, you wouldn't give a damn what happened. (Harry)

You have to love somebody. If you didn't, you wouldn't be together. Those arguments that you have, you would just walk away, but I know her and I respect her, and I love her. (Richard)

Commitment. Commitment to marriage was another belief reiterated by the majority of the couples. Respondents felt the marriage vows were permanent, and created a life long commitment regardless of any difficulties. Some individuals indicated their marriages were trying at times, but the commitment to family and marriage was too important to give up. Therefore, constant negotiation and the willingness to endure difficult times was necessary.

Our commitment to each other when we were married [made it work]. I felt strong about it. I sometimes would get discouraged and think maybe it won't last, but just go day by day. (Ivan)

Don't give up so easily. I think a lot of people today do that. They think, "oh, we can get divorced." I think they should really be sure before they get married...and that this is going to be a life long commitment and be patient with each other, love each other. (Gladys)

When we got married, we just planned on being married all of our lives. We didn't plan on, if it doesn't work out, I am going to get out of it. I don't know if it was a general feeling in those days, or if it was just us. I thought marriage was important and family was important. (Maude)

Not only was commitment to the marriage important, but the mere expectation that the marriage would always exist was extremely influential. Many couples claimed their marriages were successful because they never expected anything different. This cohort seemed to be affected particularly by the serious and permanent nature of the marital vows. Expectations surrounding marital success were imposed by several social institutions including family, church, and cultural attitudes toward divorce. Several spouses got married under the guise, they would stay married.

It's just when we got married, we got married to expect it to last and work toward that goal. We have had a few differences, but worked it out. (Mac)

Well, I suppose, we had expectations from us and from our families. I guess we never considered it wouldn't work. (Evelyn)

We got married intending to stay married. We got into it with the idea that it is going to last. (Eldon)

Togetherness. Many of the spouses strongly supported time spent together as a key ingredient to a successful marriage. Couples argued that both husbands and wives should concentrate on spending time together, rather than time apart. In fact, a few of the couples cited time away from spouses as a major contributor to the decline of contemporary marriages. Time together was viewed as a special time to share a range of mutual interests and activities. Golfing, travelling, and being involved in organizations were just a few of the activities long-term married couples specified as areas of dual interest. Spouses

enjoyed the time they spent with their partner and actually preferred time with their spouses than with others.

We do a lot of things together.... we like to garden, we both like to read, we both like to entertain, we like to take vacations. We pretty much like the same things.
(Betty)

One of the things (that makes a marriage work), is that, I don't know if it's anything else, working together at home and at church and in the community. Working together more than separately. (Charlie)

I would say, do things together. I mean don't go off by yourself in doing something and leave your wife or spouse to do something else. You share things and work together and trust one another. I think that's a good relationship.
(George)

Well, we had a real good marriage and we always worked together.... Well, we didn't realize what we were really doing, but the neighbors had told us that. When they see the car go, we were both in the car. She said, "when the car leaves, there is always two in the car." She thought we had a very good marriage. (Ned)

Despite the fact, some couples felt togetherness was good, others argued the contrary. A few of the respondents contended that a certain amount of separate time was needed for a successful marriage. Separate time allowed for individuals to achieve some personal independence and freedom. Time alone seemed to be savored, particularly by the wives. Most of the separate time was spent in outside hobbies or activities their partners did not particularly enjoy or in which they were not interested.

I think it is good to get away from each other. My husband loves to play horseshoes.... He often says why don't I go with him, but I think it is the most boring thing to sit and watch people throw horseshoes. I like to do things by myself when he is not here. I think it is very important that you do have time alone.
(Gladys)

No, I don't think we do things too much together 'cause we've always had our own theory. I mean, I played golf; of course, it was always with men, so that left her taking care of the house and the children. I bowled in a mixed league, where, believe it or not, you learn to tolerate women. Cause they get set in their ways.... she didn't care for that stuff. (Lyle)

Family backgrounds. Parental influence was another factor couples acknowledged as a contributor to long-term marriage. Many of the spouses indicated their own parents

had been married for at least 50 years or more. Their parents' marriages were mentioned as role models for their own married lives. In addition, couples stated that siblings were also involved in long-term relationships. Many of the spouses believed the attitudes and values that were prevalent during the era they were raised helped them achieve long-term marital status. Divorce and separation appeared not to be culturally acceptable ways of living for this cohort.

I think it's our background, I mean the way we were brought up. I mean, we were a completely different generation, and we were brought up to handle, and not to quit more or less. My folks had a 50 year marriage, 52 I guess. And my brother, he probably had about 40, he died when he was 60. (Avis)

Well, I suppose the way we was raised. I mean, kids are raised a lot different nowadays, in the last 20 years, than we were. I suppose you could say we come up through the hard times, a little bit rougher than we got now. I suppose if we'd been rich or something like that we'd never made it. But we went through everything together and the hard times, and the good times. (Frank)

Other characteristics. Couples identified a range of other characteristics that solidified a long-term marriage. Although these characteristics were not mentioned as frequently by couples, there was minimal support for the following concepts: companionship, a sense of humor, mutual friends, and being old-fashioned.

A few of the spouses believed friendship and companionship were worthy qualities of a long-term marriage. The ability to share ideas and mutually enjoy each other's company were traits that appeared to lead to marital happiness.

I think that you have to have companionship to have a happy marriage. (Betty)

Friendship. Be a friend. You get along if you're a friend. (Charlotte)

A sense of humor was also specified as a tool for marital success. The ability to laugh at oneself and one's problems seemed to help spouses keep their marital woes in proper perspective. Wives specifically described their husbands as being silly, funny, or as jokesters.

A good sense of humor. He is very funny you know. You couldn't be mad at him for very long. He always had a joke. (Gladys)

He is silly at times. Most people don't think so, but I see very silly things. (Gertrude)

Sharing long-term friendships with other couples seemed to unify marital relationships. Social networks and shared activities with long time friends were highlighted as happy times. In fact, couples were very sentimental about their friends as they recalled fondly the many hours spent together. One of the husbands started to cry as he discussed the importance of community and friends to his married life. The friends couples shared were seldom new acquaintances, but were friendships fostered early in their marriages that had lasted over the course of their marriage.

I think the most important thing in our life is friends. We play cards, play bridge. I'm getting sentimental. There's so many things that will make it last. It's just knowing people. That's it. I think community. Like all this community around here. (Bennie)

We had a lot of the same friends. We've had the same friends all through the years. I think that is a plus, too. (Betty)

Through the last 30 to 40 years, I wouldn't say we've got that many real, real close friends, but the ones that we have, we've known for quite a few years. (Avis)

Obviously, each individual had his/her unique perspective on how to succeed in marriage. The following interview data are unified by a rule-oriented theme. However, these standards did not represent the viewpoints of entire sample. Rather, wives were more likely to advocate certain guidelines for appropriate marital behavior. These perspectives somewhat address particular rules of behavior that guide marital success. Old-fashioned values and beliefs resonate through these remarks.

Be old-fashioned. (Frances)

Privacy was a big issue. I just don't believe in these women that go to coffee klatches and tell everything that happens in their bedroom, and everything that happens in their home. That's not right, and I never did it. (Jacqueline)

I am against wives having a night out by themselves without their husbands. I don't believe in that. That a husband has a night out. I think that causes friction in

time. Maybe not at the time, but that could be brought up later, "well, you did this that night" or something. (Nancy)

When reviewing the keys to marital success outlined by these couples, the strength of the long-term marriage is more clearly understood. Undoubtedly, the strong sense of commitment was a major factor holding marriages together. Period effects such as family backgrounds, cultural expectations, and old-fashioned beliefs also were strong influences upon the long-term marriage. However, many of the characteristics such as sense of humor, tolerance, love, and togetherness are qualities contemporary marriages also identify as desirable. Perhaps the success secrets of these golden wedding anniversary couples are secrets common to all successful marriages.

Desirable partner qualities

Both husbands and wives gave positive descriptions of their spouses. Most of the couples listed qualities they appreciated about their spouse or characteristics their spouses possessed that contributed to the enduring relationship. Many of the qualities described were behavior oriented rather than focusing on the personality of their partner. The theme of "goodness" was particularly apparent in all of the couples' comments.

Wives portrayed their husbands in accordance to social roles. Words like "hard working", "good father", and "helpful" were used to illustrate their husband's traits. However, most of the qualities indicated what husbands did for others, rather than what husbands did specifically for their wives. For the most part, women did not comment on any relational qualities like loving, thoughtful, or supportive, but gave more global perspectives of their husbands.

He's kind. Good natured. Always happy. Good to the children and good to me. He helps me with the work, and if I need anything he gets it for me. He always remembers me on birthdays and anniversaries. He's just a good all around guy. (Hilda)

He is easy going, hard working, honest, family oriented. Always ready to help a neighbor. And that can be good or bad, but as I say, he's ready to help. That is nice. (Maude)

He is a very friendly person. He loves to visit people. He likes people. Ben is neat. He likes to keep his appearances up, even when we're just around here. (Betty)

He is a good husband. He's a good father. He's considerate and very loving. He's a very good man. He is a very good Christian man. He thinks a lot of his children and the grandchildren. He's one of those doting ones. He's just a good man. (Gertrude)

Husbands' descriptions were also very role oriented. Men were more likely to describe their wives' responsibilities within the home and how well their duties were fulfilled. Husbands were more likely to respond giving descriptions about their wives' emotional states. Perhaps, emotional expressiveness was different from how husbands expressed themselves, and thus was more easily discriminated and recalled. Again, rarely did men identify relational or personality qualities about their wives.

She's been good. Been a hard worker. She raised the kids good. (Frank)

She's just been good to me, always has been, outside of maybe a half day or so. (Harry)

She's a good cook. She's a good housekeeper. She's got a good disposition, except at times. (Eldon)

She's a pretty straight thinker. She is energetic and she is a mover. She likes to get things done. In a number of occasions, she wound up as the leader. She doesn't like to admit it, but she is sometimes. (Dean)

She's over emotional. I let things happen, and it bothers her. I don't worry and she gets all uptight. (Ivan)

Many times both husbands and wives were very gracious as they attributed the enduring nature of their relationship to their spouses. Partners believed it was their spouse's good nature or tolerant attitudes that helped the relationship last. Spouses credited their marital success solely upon their partner. There was no gender bias, as both husbands and wives were complemented for compassion and tolerance.

My husband was good tempered, never, never got mad. But I did. (Hilda)

Like I said, she's a lot of the reason we've been together for 52 years. It is because of her. (Bennie)

He didn't blow up back at me. You know, when you start thinking about it, that's probably the thing. The fact that he was so easy going. (Maude)

I have to give my wife all the credit cause she's the compassionate one. She's the one that puts up with me. (Lyle)

In review, husbands and wives described their partners favorably. The qualities of their mate were explained in more role-oriented than relationship-oriented terms. Partner descriptions revolved around each spouse's roles within the marriage or community and how well these roles were managed. For the most part, partners viewed their spouse as "good" and often believed the success of their marriage was due to their partner's perseverance and tolerance.

Communication

Good communication is viewed as a valuable characteristic to any marriage. Long-term couples claimed they communicated frequently and well throughout the course of their marriages. Spouses believed it was easy to talk with their mates. Many individuals thought of their partners as "best friends" and could talk about anything. Conversation topics generated by long-term couples included everything from the discussion of each other's daily events to more specific topics like sex and religion. Listening was considered by both partners to be an important component of the communication process. In fact, some respondents qualified listening as more valuable to communication than talking.

I would tell people that they need to listen to each other. They have to be good communicators for one thing. They have to be able to express themselves. Too often, the fact of lack of communication, is a bigger problem than too much of it sometimes. A lot of people have difficulty expressing themselves, and I think just because they don't know how to put things out and let things be heard, problems arise. (Dean)

Communication is important in anything. It has to be. We talk, probably not as much as we should, but we talk a lot. I think it's more listening than talking. You can talk, but a person has to listen. (Charlie)

We talked all the time. We talk, I talk constantly. He would tell me what happened at work and I would tell him what went on during the day and different things. Yeah, we talked a lot. I think that is important. (Maude)

Wives were more likely to lament about the lack of good communication within the relationship. Women felt they talked with their husbands, but did not believe the communication was always adequate. Wives were often frustrated by the lack of their husbands' attentiveness. Finally, women mentioned the television and reading materials as frequent distractions during the communication process.

We don't communicate sometimes. I think we could communicate better. Sometimes, like I've told him many times, he's engrossed in TV. I think TV's another thing that takes away. I told him many times, if I ever told you we won a million dollars and you're watching TV, you wouldn't hear me. (Frances)

I would say that we don't really talk, we never did really communicate very well. (Evelyn)

I didn't think we communicated as much as we should. But then again, maybe not too many couples do.... I have to drag it out. I talk more than he does, and I didn't use to. (Gertrude)

I don't think we're the best communicators. We do talk, and yet, we don't talk too much because he's an avid reader. I just read the other night to him in the paper, the average couple don't talk more than four minutes. I said to him, "do we talk more than four minutes?" He was just reading his book and he said, "we talk when we're at meal times." (Rose)

Although husbands stated that communication occurred within the marriage on a fairly regular basis, they were receptive to their wives' frustration with the quality of communication. A few men commented that, although they felt their communication was adequate, they were completely aware their wives did not think their communication was sufficient.

We don't talk too much. She gives me hell over that every once in awhile. I get started reading, or it's hard to, unless you've been doing something. Geez, after 55 years you know, it's real hard to say, there isn't anything that you haven't talked about. But we talk, talk everyday. (Harry)

She would say I wouldn't talk, but yeah, I think we talk quite a bit. But she'd say no, he don't talk. I know what she's gonna say. (Richard)

When couples get busy, especially during the child rearing years, the opportunity for relational communication may decrease. Many of the long-term couples admitted the hassles of every day life certainly hindered the communication process, but respondents seemed to make conscious attempts to keep in touch with their partners. Some couples specifically recalled bed time as a time to talk with their partners. However, other couples never specifically allocated time to communicate, as they believed they had sufficient opportunities during the day such as over meal time and after the kids had gone to bed.

I've done a lot of listening. But we were willing to talk, and it was a good time when all the kids were in bed, then we could sit and relax and talk. And that was good. But usually, it was hard to find time to be alone, but we did try to go out by ourselves at least once a month, sometimes more than that, and that was something that we both agreed on. That we had to have some time alone. (Jacqueline)

Usually our evening meal was the time when we had things to discuss, but when he was working at John Deere, lots of times he was on the afternoon or the night shift, that was rough. (Rose)

I don't know as we sent the kids to bed early so we could talk, our talking was mostly done in bed. (Frances)

Perceptions of divorce

Most of the couples recalled never thinking about divorce. Long-term spouses believed their relationships had never deteriorated to the point where divorce was ever considered an option. Some couples recalled facetiously telling their partners they were "going to leave," but these statements were said more in jest than in seriousness. Women, in particular, did not think they could have managed their families independently. Some wives spoke of the influence of the times, and how unequipped for a separate life they would have been had they left. They lacked job skills and the ability to provide monetarily for a household with children. The following interview data respond to this research question: 7) Was divorce ever an option for either partner and how were difficulties negotiated?

There was never a time that divorce was an option. Nope, never got to that. First, I think I was scared to death of it, and secondly, I don't think I could have. Financially, I was a secretary, so I didn't make that much money. I couldn't have survived anyway. I guess I never thought about it. (Doreen)

No, divorce was never an option. At least not for me. I would have never. I never thought that I could do better by getting a divorce. Of course, by the time I would have thought about it, I had six kids. No, I'm just being facetious. Divorce was never an option. (Maude)

For the most part, problems long-term couples faced within their marriages appeared to be surmountable. Spouses recalled periods of conflict, but described the conflict as manageable. Once again, there was a clear period effect as it appeared the negative stigma surrounding divorce often kept couples together. For this age cohort, there seemed to be the expectation that maintaining a marriage included enduring difficulties. Couples openly admitted to having "rocky times," but believed the troubles would eventually work themselves out. Acceptance, tolerance, and communication were dominant themes mentioned frequently by respondents as keys to working through the difficulties of marriage.

That's the word, acceptance. She and I argued to beat hell, but we never, at least I never, threatened divorce or even thought of threatening divorce. (Eldon)

Things are so different than they are now. I can see that the guys have got to help the women now, because the women work away from home. You see, you're from a totally different school. You know, there is just no comparison, because if things did get rocky for us, divorce was probably the last thing that was on our mind. (Rose)

Oh, just hang on. It'll take care of itself. You've just got to hang on, that's all. Course, we've had some arguments and most of it's probably been my fault, but we hung on and seen it through. I don't think it was ever real close to dissolving our marriage. (Richard)

Three of the respondents had entertained the thought of divorce, but either dismissed it, or later regretted it. Two of the individuals had considered divorce in the early years of their marriages. A final respondent was a woman who had great difficulty dealing with her husband's illness. At the time of her marital difficulties, she was unaware of her husband's brain tumor, which affected his behavior drastically. She could not cope

with his erratic mood changes and was very dissatisfied with her marital relationship. This event happened in the latter stages of her marriage. Commitment and a genuine concern for their partner's well-being deterred these respondents from seeking a divorce.

When I look back on it now, I am wondering if it was when he had the beginning of this pressure here. He was very irritable, very hard to get along with, we argued and had more problems during the time. In fact, there was even time during that, I would have never actually left, but I entertained thoughts, that I didn't want to live like this. Because I haven't all these years. I've always been happy, you know. But when you sit and think about it, where would he go? Well, I loved him enough that I thought, I don't know where he would go and I wouldn't rest. So it never came to pass. I don't know if he even knows I felt that way, or if he felt that way. We just never discussed it. We had a period of four, five years in there where things were, well, there was just more irritation I would say. (Lydia)

A few years back I considered divorce. Wouldn't gain anything, I guess. Like I said, commitment. I guess that's why I never really, I wanted things to be better and hoped that I could work things out so that they would be better, I guess. When I was young, I talked to a lawyer one time, I was sorry I did. You know, it's my life, I'll make the best of it. (Ivan)

I remember one time I thought I was going home to mother. Not as far as divorce, I have never thought of that. I didn't and I wouldn't have done it, but I was confused at the time. (Gertrude)

Couples attribute the high rate of divorce in contemporary marriages to an array of factors. Most of the spouses believed younger couples today lack commitment and do not work hard enough to make their marriages successful. Long-term couples blamed current attitudes and values surrounding marriage as downfalls to marital success. Divorce is perceived by these elderly couples as too easy of an option. Television, women working outside of the home, the decline of morality, and financial problems were all considered to be detrimental to the modern marriage by long-term couples.

I don't think they give themselves a chance. They all want to do their own thing, and they don't, I just don't think they try to work things out. It's too easy to get a divorce. (Avis)

Well, outside of the fact I think an awful lot of couples go into marriage thinking well, if it doesn't work, we will get a divorce. I'm not saying all of them, but I think the morals of today have a lot to do with it. I am not criticizing the younger people, but I think a lot of them have different views on so many things, and it's a conflict to begin with. (Gertrude)

The young people, well if things don't go their way, why they're through, on both sides. They expect a lot more than what they get. They don't want to give and take. They want to, more or less, take. And when it don't work out that way, why find somebody else you can do that with. (Ivan)

It is clear this cohort is affected strongly by the values and implied lifetime commitment of marriage. Divorce was rarely considered to be a solution for ending marital difficulties. One woman mentioned that the presence of abuse was the only valid reason for dissolving a marriage. Even if the idea of divorce was entertained, it was quickly dismissed as the mores of this cohort did not support marital dissolution. Therefore, commitment and expectations were influential qualities in maintaining and enduring a long-term marriage.

Final thoughts

Most couples reflected on how quickly the 50 years of their marriage had passed. Many respondents reminisced about the good times they had experienced throughout the years. Some individuals stated they did not feel older, and could not believe how much their lives had changed in the past 50 years. One couple proudly gave me a copy of their wedding picture, a possible testament to the many years that had passed. Despite the fact that interviews had ended, many of the couples reflected on their married lives as they gave me tours of their homes pointing out photographs of children and grandchildren. At this point in their marital careers, couples were taking one day at a time and seemed to be maritally satisfied.

It's gone awfully fast, it certainly has. We take one day at a time now. It hasn't seemed like 50 years. You look at the pictures, and you were so young back there. It's gone real quickly. (Avis)

It doesn't really seem like 50 years. When we had our 50th, I mean, I felt just as good at my 50th as I did my 25th, you know. (Frank)

Looking back, it sure doesn't feel like 50 years. You know, even feeling my age, I don't feel like I'm as old as I am. We're all getting up there, and it doesn't seem like that many years went by. (Ivan)

Many of the couples felt very fortunate to have lived this long as well as accomplishing 50 years of marriage. Some spouses contended they would get married to the same person again. Marriage in the later years of life brought some couples closer together. Partners felt their marriages had matured, and they were more dependent upon each other in the later years of their lives.

It was a good marriage. I'd probably do it over. (Rose)

Well, it's matured in everything. You go along, and you keep understanding more of each other all the time. As you get older, even more. (Charlie)

I feel like we're closer now than we ever were, and I think when you get, when you're alone, you depend on each other more. You help each other more because you have more time to do this. (Gertrude)

It's been a really good life, and I wouldn't change it for anything. (Glenn)

The interview data of long-term married couples provided rich descriptions of their lives and their difficulties. The four major themes of life events, marital conflict, resolution strategies, and keys to marital longevity were successful in addressing the proposed research questions. The long-term married couples did experience conflict in their marriages; however, the conflicts were described as infrequent and minimal. There were several issues that precipitated conflict. Issues such as money management and dealing with in-laws affected these couples, but continue to be present in contemporary marriages. However, issues such as roles, child rearing, and religion were resolved according to the expectations and beliefs of the age cohort. In fact, many of issues and problems of long-term married couples were greatly influenced and guided by the attitudes and values of this particular cohort. Finally, couples commented on their perceptions of the qualities of a long-term marriage. Interestingly, the qualities outlined are perhaps desirable traits of any marriage. The qualities of commitment, love, togetherness, and respect were frequently

mentioned attributes. Marital vows were respected and revered by long-term couples. Moreover, marital vows compelled many couples to work out relationship problems, rather than seek divorce. Indeed, the interview data unraveled and illuminated the enduring nature of a 50 year marriage.

DISCUSSION

The data obtained through unstructured interviews reveals a greater depth and breadth of information than survey research as indicated by Fontana and Frey (1994). The data are indeed rich and colorful descriptions of marital life. Although the information is only a partial view of each individual's life and perceptions of marriage, a great deal can be learned regarding the conflict of long-term marriages and how conflicts are resolved throughout the life span. In addition, couples' life histories provide significant information about what makes a 50 year marriage endure. The data collected were influenced by both gender differences and the age cohort. Therefore, the following discussion specifically examines how these factors play a role in long-term married couples' perspectives of their lives.

Life Events

As the interview data indicate, life events are recalled fairly similarly by both partners. As Martin concluded (1985), the remembering of significant events is not difficult for respondents. Although couples have some difficulty recalling specific dates, they are able to construct a time line retrospectively of major life events. Couples not only recall events that occur within the marriage, but mention external events. Historical and social events such as WW II and economic dips are clear external influences. Therefore, spouses are able to recall their lives in relation to both internal events and external events of the marital relationship. Thus, the advantages of the life course perspective is realized as the individual's life is understood from three time perspectives: individual time, family time, and historical time (Aldous, 1990).

There are some noted differences in how men and women recall major life events. Each partner's individual roles influence how he/she reflects upon past lives. Thus, the concept of individual time is illuminated. Men are more likely to remember events as they pertain to their roles of provider. Life events are often described in relation to their careers. Events such as moves, job changes, and retirement are highlighted with significance. In contrast, women detail their lives in relation to their children. Because the roles of caretaker and mother are the center of women's lives, events such as births, children's graduations, and children's marriages are easily remembered. In addition, only wives mention miscarriages. The recalling of miscarriages is consistent with their role as mother and the memory sadly marks their early years of marriage.

In reference to family time, both spouses identify childrens' births as major life events. Although husbands have greater difficulty remembering actual birth dates, the birth of a child is almost an automatic recollection for both husbands and wives. Anniversaries and family vacations involving children are also frequently remembered by both spouses. This finding confirms a study by Wolinsky (1986). Older individuals often define life's worth and accomplishments through their relationships with family.

This older cohort lived through the Great Depression, married near the end of World War II, and raised their families during a time of political and social stability (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993). World War II was an external and historical event particularly affecting many of the couples' first years of marriage. Interestingly, the war was the reason many of the couples met and married. Despite the separations many couples experienced at the beginning of their marriages because of the war, marriages survived. Indeed, the war influenced the lives of men significantly. One man described in detail his six month stay in a P.O.W. camp, and other men talked about their time overseas. Yet, the war also influenced the women. They suffered many sacrifices while their

husbands were off at war. Housing was scarce, money was minimal, and family support was largely depended upon. Women talked about the loneliness they experienced without their husbands. In many cases, wives were left to manage households and raise families while husbands were away. Consequently, the end of the war called for much celebration. Following the war, several of the couples were soon married, and newlyweds were brought together again. An event such as World War II is an event that affects individual lives, but married lives as well. Yet, historically, the effect of war upon marriages is unique, particularly in long-term marriages. Hence, it makes the study of these marriages all the more interesting, as in all likelihood, a war of this magnitude or type will never influence marriages in the future.

Conflict

Couples report seldom or sometimes having conflict throughout their married lives. Yet, spouses did not deny having periods of conflict in their marriage. In fact, they believe any marriage is prone to a few problems. However, retrospectively, couples recall experiencing very little conflict throughout their marital careers. This finding is partially supported by Zietlow and Sillars (1988) and McConagle et al. (1984). Zietlow and Sillars (1988) documented in their study that older couples experienced less conflicts. The latter study reported a negative relationship between length of marriage and disagreement frequency. However, neither of these studies analyzed marital conflict over the life span. Rather, cross-sectional designs were used to study marital conflict in older couples. Therefore, a question remains as to whether conflict progressively declines as the marriage ages, if infrequent conflict is inherent in the longevity of long-term marriages, or if couples just do not remember the frequency of conflict in earlier life stages.

Fitzpatrick (1988) in her work on marital types has shed some light upon the infrequency of conflict in long-term marriages. She categorized marriages into three types: traditionals, separates, and independents. The long-term married couples seemed to fit best into the traditional type. Traditionals are very committed to the marriage, have similar values, and engage in very conventional male and female roles. Conflict over power and roles is less likely to occur in traditional marriages because socially mandated norms and conventions are mutually accepted by both partners. Because the long-term couples in this study are primarily traditional, the expectations and roles of marriage perhaps never needed to be negotiated. Therefore, conflict frequency in long-term marriages may be minimal.

The lack of self-disclosure found among long-term couples, particularly when discussing conflicts, further clouds the findings (Zietlow & Sillars, 1988). Perhaps, conflict is present in marital relationships, but because elderly couples disclose less than couples in any other life stage, they are more reticent to discuss their problems in an open interview. Thus, there may have been higher levels of conflict than actually reported.

Finally, the theory of symbolic interaction is helpful in understanding long-term couples' perceptions of conflict. Married couples co-create their perceptions and views of marital life through constant interpersonal interaction. A couple's satisfaction with their present relationship may influence, and ultimately re-construct, their past marital experiences (Stephen, 1984). Thus, if long-term couples perceive their present relationship as satisfying and free of major conflict, as these couples did, their perception might distort reality. The frequency and severity of past conflicts may be understated or glossed over by respondents. Clearly, the frequency of conflict in long-term marriages needs further investigation.

Information regarding conflict rules in long-term marriages did emerge from the interview data. Honeycutt et al. (1993) indicated that couples in the early stages of

marriage created rules mutually that guided conflict behavior. When rules are understood and endorsed by both partners, couples reported feeling better about their marriages (Acitelli et al., 1993). Long-term couples did discuss a range of rules they believe to be important during conflict. Some rules include never arguing in front of the children and never going to bed mad. However, a few couples made comments that going to bed mad was a more sensible solution as it allows parties to think over the issue and put the problem into proper perspective. Couples overwhelmingly agree that holding grudges and dwelling on problems is detrimental to the relationship. Spouses emphasize the need for partners to choose their fights as not every problem is worth arguing over.

Symbolic interaction serves to explain rule making in marriages as well. As married couples co-create their world, roles, rules, and expected social patterns evolve (Stephen, 1984). As long as both partners mutually agree on these behaviors and social patterns, it is likely the spouses will have less difficulties. Long-term couples over the life span negotiate compatible and acceptable guidelines that monitor and control conflict communication. When partners abide by these rules, conflict is more productive. Hence, the joint agreement of conflict rules, appears to be a strength for long-term marriages.

Kirchler (1988) reported that conflict resolution strategies have more of a bearing on marital happiness than the frequency of conflict. Resolution tactics in marital relationships range from ignoring the problem totally to engaging actively in its resolution (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993). In this sample of long-term married couples, avoidance is the most commonly used resolution style. Avoidance involves denying the existence of conflict, changing the topic, or communicating around the issue (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993). Spouses report they ignore the problem, give in to their partners, and withdraw from conflict. This somewhat contradicts Laur and Laur (1986). They found that older couples engage in more problem-solving techniques than younger couples and attempt to

attack the problem rather than the person. Ironically, avoidance strategies in marital relationships are viewed by researchers and therapists as more harmful than constructive engagement (Christiansen & Pasch, 1993). Hence, an important question must be asked. How do these long-term marriages survive if conflict is typically avoided? Haefner et al. (1991) addressed this issue in their study. They reported that higher levels of marital satisfaction often acted as a buffer against negative reactions related to unresolved conflict. Therefore, since the majority of long-term married respondents perceive their marriages as highly satisfying, perhaps the negative feelings related to unresolved conflict are moderated. Marital satisfaction may indeed be the culmination of multiple relationship factors other than just conflict.

Avoidance strategies of older marriages may also be the result of a period effect. Zietlow and Sillars (1988) indicated that elderly couples were less expressive and more noncommittal. Therefore, active conflict management involving open expression and mutual negotiation are behaviors possibly uncomfortable or unfamiliar to this specific age cohort. Active conflict management between genders might be particularly unfamiliar to some members of an age cohort that rigidly adhere to traditional roles and values.

There are apparent gender differences in how men and women manage conflict. Long-term married wives are more expressive during conflict, and become frustrated when husbands are unwilling to mutually discuss marital problems. Wives also worry more than husbands about the conflict. The female respondents' comments are somewhat consistent with other studies on gender and conflict. Women are more likely to be open about the tensions within their marriages (White, 1985). In addition, Canary et al. (1988) suggested that women try to preserve a positive relationship during conflict. Perhaps a wife's desire to openly communicate about the problem fulfills her need to maintain the relationship. Berryman-Fink and Brunner (1987) corroborated this finding. They found women that

had a tendency to stress the interpersonal relationship and were more likely to demonstrate attentiveness and openness. In this study, long-term married wives also report becoming more emotional during conflict, often resorting to yelling or verbal aggression.

Christiansen and Pasch (1993) documented similar findings. When the issues of relational closeness and the allocation of household duties are at stake, women behave in a more demanding role. Thus, when such issues are left unsettled in long-term marriages, wives have a tendency to become angry, scream, or cry.

For the most part, long-term married husbands avoid conflict. Several men report walking away or finding something else to do while their wives cool down. Occasionally, husbands engage in discussions with their wives after a cool-down period. Again, these conflict behaviors are similar to other gender studies. Husbands are more likely to prefer conflict styles characterized as antisocial (Berryman-Fink & Brunner, 1987). In addition, because husbands often desire a greater independence within the marriage, they withdraw from conflict (Christiansen & Pasch, 1993). Using "logic" and "rationalizations" to resolve conflict are common themes expressed by long-term married husbands. In the present study, men prefer using logical strategies when dealing with conflict and wish their wives would engage in conflict more reasonably.

Although most respondents do not think their conflict management styles have changed over the years, some wives feel otherwise. Some women believe they have become more assertive than in past years when dealing with conflict, and are less likely to stay quiet if something bothers them. This change may be explained partially as some studies indicate a "cross-over" in sex role orientation in the later years of life (Troll et al., 1979). Men may become less aggressive, and women become more aggressive than in previous life stages (Brubaker & Kinsel, 1984). Assertive behavior may be the result of women seeking independence after their many years in the caretaking role. Moreover,

some long-term married wives attribute their assertive behavior to the times. They feel the equal treatment afforded to modern wives allows long-term married wives the opportunity to be assertive in their own marriages.

Resolving Marital Issues

Few studies indicate the sources of conflict that cause problems in the long-term marriage. Consequently, the conflict sources mentioned in this study are rather exploratory in nature, and most sources can not be substantiated with other studies. Therefore, to understand better conflict sources in the long-term marriage, research examining marital conflict in general will be used. Christiansen and Pasch (1993) asserted there are two major domains of conflict within marriages: closeness and dominance. The closeness domain consists of conflicts that deal with relationship needs. The dominance domain is comprised of conflicts that are precipitated by differences in decision-making and control. As couples recall the sources of conflict over their married lives, it appears the majority of conflicts experienced in long-term marriages falls within the domain of dominance. These conflict sources include: religion, money, roles, children, and retirement. Aside from retirement, conflicts about these issues seem to occur primarily in the early to middle stages of marriage. Conflicts surrounding intimacy are the only source mentioned by couples that can be considered as part of the closeness domain. As Fitzpatrick (1988) noted, traditional couples have a tendency to have more conflicts over content issues than over relational or structural issues. Long-term couples indicate intimacy problems are more frequent in the later stages of life. Problems resulting from interaction with in-laws did not fit in either domain.

It may be that the domains introduced by Christiansen and Pasch (1993) characterize younger couples' marriages more accurately than the marriages of long-term

couples, however because relationships of long-term couples appear to be less equitable and less expressive than younger couples, resolution strategies seem less affected by control and intimacy struggles. Rather, the attitudes, expectations, and beliefs of this traditional cohort contribute more to the resolution of many of these marital issues.

For the majority, religion is seldom a point of contention between partners. In fact, more couples view religion as an asset to their marriage than a problem. MacKinnon et al. (1984) documented similar results. They found that couples who engaged in church activities were more likely to maintain long-term marriages. Robinson and Blanton (1993) further corroborated these findings. Couples report receiving social, emotional, and spiritual support from their religious faith. The only differences couples do experience are in the early stages of marriage. Wives are more likely to give up their own religion for their husband's religion, if they did not practice the same faith from the beginning. Therefore, perhaps motivated by the cohort, and out of respect for their husbands, wives chose to follow their husband's faith. Although seldom a problem, a couple's faith is generally decided upon by the husband's preference.

The lack of money is more of a problem for long-term married couples than decisions surrounding how to allocate it. This age cohort displays frugal attitudes and realistic expectations about spending, which most likely resulted from their childhood experiences during the Depression. Although husbands relinquish day-to-day money management to their wives, it seems as though husbands wield more marital power for major financial decisions. For example, husbands make decisions regarding investments and, at times, purchase expensive items like cars and homes without their wives' consent. These incidences generally cause major conflict. Thus, the conflict source of financial decision-making falls clearly within the dominance domain.

The division of labor within the household is negotiated very early in the marital relationship. Primarily, societal expectations determine role enactment, and little conflict ensues. Reuter and Webb (1992) argued that if a couple adopted traditional roles, in which the husband developed a career and the wife worked as homemaker, the couple may have never learned to have an interactional relationship. Therefore, the conventional roles held by long-term married couples may inhibit conflict or the outward expression of differences. In this sample, wives adhere strongly and willingly to traditional female roles. Women maintain the household, and were responsible for most of the child care. Occasionally, wives did work outside of the home for extra income, but their outside careers did not affect the division of labor. They were still expected to be fully responsible for all household management. On the other hand, husbands have acted as providers and are responsible for other duties such as automobile maintenance and lawn work. Decision-making regarding the division of labor within the long-term marriage appears to be non-negotiable and mutually accepted. Role decisions are primarily prescribed by the attitudes and beliefs of this particular cohort. Consequently, long-term married couples experience few role-related conflicts.

After retirement, the division of labor and decision-making patterns may change (Ekerdt & Vinick, 1991). Some research contends that although wives continue to have primary responsibilities of most household duties, older retired men may increase their participation in household chores (Ward, 1993). These findings are verified in these interview data as well. Husbands are reluctant to help with most household tasks, but they occasionally cook meals or engage in various types of housework. Brubaker and Kinsel (1984) reported that elderly couples were more likely to share tasks than divide them. Indeed, the long-term husbands and wives in this study share some daily tasks, particularly if their partners are limited physically.

The issues of child rearing appears to be the only source of conflict decided upon exclusively by women. Long-term couples indicate the child rearing years breached more periods of conflict. As other studies (Schumm & Burgaighis, 1986) noted, marital happiness may have a curvilinear pattern. Couples start out happy in the early stages of marriage, but once the children are born and through the child rearing years, satisfaction levels decline. Couples become more involved in child care and financial concerns, and the marital relationship is secondary. After the children leave, couples again experience an increase in happiness. The most common reason for argument during the child rearing years is discipline. However, because child rearing is considered within the realm of "women's work," the wife's decisions are likely the final word. Both spouses appear to recognize and respect the wife's right to create and enforce the rules for the children. MacKinnon et al. (1984) found that those couples sharing compatible goals toward child rearing are more likely to maintain a long-term marriage. Some husbands did express regret for not playing more of a role in their children's lives, but resolved their dissonance by reaffirming the necessity for their role as provider. Furthermore, both husbands and wives pacify their dissonance by passively involving fathers in parenting. If fathers are not actively involved, wives keep them informed of their children and recruit their help with practical care (Backett, 1987). Clearly, child rearing differences can be considered under the domain of dominance. However, the period effect cannot be underestimated. Because of the strict adherence to traditional roles, wives are expected to have the prerogative to make decisions regarding children.

Problems with in-laws are seldom a cause of friction between long-term couples. In fact, couples did express a great deal of appreciation for their in-laws. In many cases, spouses spoke fondly of their partners' family. Wives are more likely to express dislike, fear, or annoyance with in-laws, but seldom express their feelings openly. Any problems

that did occur with in-laws caused conflict between the spouse and the in-law. Family difficulties did not surface between husband and wife. In-laws are often involved in family celebrations and vacations, and were emotionally and financially supportive in the early stages of marriage. Conflicts erupting between spouses and in-laws are described as minor, and generally occurred in the early to middle stages of marriage.

Because older cohorts disclose less than younger cohorts, intimacy was not expected to be an issue long-term couples discuss openly. Yet, both wives and husbands did disclose some information regarding their intimate lives. Gilford (1986) indicated that sexual interest and intimacy remain integral parts of long-term marriages. Conflicts between partners regarding intimacy were not mentioned. However, spouses did express concern about their sexual lives. The later stages of the marriage precipitate some sexual problems often due to declines in a partner's physical health. Wolinsky (1986) indicated that the negotiation of new intimacy patterns is a developmental task older spouses must eventually manage. These long-term couples did not state specifically whether they discuss frustrations in intimacy patterns with their partners. Intimacy conflicts fall within Christiansen and Pasch's (1993) closeness domain.

In older marriages, sexual expression varies, and physical closeness remains an important factor in the expression of intimacy (Gilford, 1986). Many long-term couples contend the passionate type of love experienced early in marriage, dissipates some, but grows into a more stable, companionate type of love than experienced previously. Couples indicate that love is expressed through kissing, holding hands, saying "I Love You," and through sexual behavior (Brubaker & Roberto, 1993). One woman's comments indicate a heavy theme of traditionalism. She believes the ability to satisfy a husband's needs is important to maintaining intimacy in the marriage. Thus, sexual expression among long-term couples is subtly negotiated by traditional mores and expectations.

In the later years of marriage, health problems and retirement cause conflict in long-term marriages. Zarit (1986) stated the added strain and burden of poor health may have a negative effect on the overall quality of the marital relationship. This finding is also true in this sample. Poor health affects partners' moods, needs, and in some cases, their ability to express themselves clearly. Consequently, conflict between long-term spouses arises much more frequently during periods of illness. In fact, one woman marked her husband's illness as the only cause of current marital problems. Quirouette and Gold (1992) found that marital satisfaction for both partners is significantly higher when a husband's mental and physical health is good. Again, this finding is consistent in this sample. Particularly, long-term wives express more marital distress when their husbands' health is poor. Zarit (1986) argued that women may resent caretaking responsibilities in the later years of life. Hence, long-term wives may feel frustrated and burdened by their husband's ill health in the later years. Consequently, relationship problems and conflicts may occur more frequently because of feelings of resentment and frustration.

The transition to retirement may involve both benefits and costs to the long-term marriage. Fewer commitments and less time constraints may be beneficial to the relationship, but overall changes in schedules and time together may be trying (Ward, 1993). Most of the couples feel their transition to retirement has gone smoothly. They enjoy sharing more time together and appreciate the companionship. Couples have become more active in church activities, civic organizations, and participate in shared interests like gardening, golfing, and visiting children. Yet, a few of the couples describe periods of more conflict as a result of retirement. Wives report losing personal privacy and control of their daily schedules. Ekerdt and Vinick (1991) stated that, following retirement, wives' household and social routines were disturbed. If spouses have difficulty adjusting to new patterns, conflicts may become more frequent (Greenbaum & Rader, 1989). Indeed, a few

long-term wives believe their husbands are around too much, and intrude upon their work and personal space. However, when long-term husbands keep their schedules busy and occupy their time with outside hobbies or activities, the transition to retirement appears to be easier for both husbands and wives. Sporakowski and Axelson (1984) documented similar results. A couple's adjustment to retirement greatly affects the morale of both husbands and wives in long-term marriages.

Keys to an Enduring Marriage

Long-term couples have not only outlived other peers, but still manage to maintain lasting marriages. Ade-Ridder (1985) summarized recent research, and concluded that older couples were very satisfied with their marital relationships. What contributes to the enduring nature of long-term marriages? Spouses discuss many characteristics they believe to be important components of the long-term marriage. Respect is the most common answer given by respondents for marital longevity. Commitment is the second most stated answer. Gilford (1986) argued that the cohort of "golden era" marriages were particularly affected by the value and obligation of commitment. Social institutions like family and church further reinforce the value of commitment. Therefore, a committed marriage, necessitates the need for respect. Couples went into marriages knowing, that despite difficulties, their marital vows would always be honored. Thus, without the option of divorce, respect and tolerance are essential keys to managing a long-term marriage. Laur and Laur (1986) further verified these findings by stating that commitment also meant the willingness to endure difficult times.

Long-term spouses also comment that love and togetherness are factors that benefit their marriage. Interestingly, husbands are more likely to mention love as a component to the long-term marriage than wives. Yet, as other research indicates, husbands in the later

stages of marriage depend heavily on wives for intimacy and support (Greenbaum & Rader, 1989). Moreover, men report feeling more satisfied with their marriages than women (MacKinnon et al., 1984). These findings may support why long-term husbands view their marriages so lovingly. In the later years, couples particularly enjoy the time they spend together. Couples enjoy sharing activities, but also appreciate time spent together in daily chores and errands. MacKinnon et al. (1984) noted that shared activities accentuated the level of compatibility and flexibility in the marriage. Despite enjoying time together, some couples contend that occasionally spending time apart is essential. Wives particularly savor spending time alone. Perhaps the moments of individual time wives have away from household hassles and children are too few and greatly appreciated.

Family influence is another factor holding long-term marriages together. Long-term couples have parents and siblings who have also been involved in long-term marriages. Several of the couples' parents had been married for 50 years and more. Being married for 50 years is not uncommon among these families. Furthermore, spouses believe their family backgrounds and traditional upbringings contribute to their respect for the institution of marriage. Clearly, this cohort is particularly affected by their own families long standing traditions, religious beliefs, and family expectations.

Although not as frequently mentioned, long-term couples identify companionship, a sense of humor, mutual friends, and old-fashioned values as keys to achieving a lasting marriage. As Laur and Laur (1986) noted, spouses perceived their partners to be their "best friends." Wives are particularly struck by their husbands' senses of humor. Women feel they see a humorous side of their husbands that perhaps others do not see or are not privy to. A sense of humor helps couples keep their problems and lives in perspective.

Couples also spoke of the influence of long-time friends. Many couples have maintained friendships for over 30 years. Because mobility is less frequent than present

day families with this cohort, it is possible to keep in touch with friends for longer periods of time. In addition, few couples have moved repeatedly over their marital careers. Most of the couples have been raised in or moved to their hometowns in the early years of marriage.

Finally, wives advocate certain rules and perspectives that they consider to be old-fashioned. Women believe wives should not share their family matters with friends, and a "night out" with women friends is unnecessary, and potentially damaging to the marital relationship. Again, these comments seem to be a product of this cohort. Because of a strong sense of tradition and duty, wives' priorities have always been with their families and their husbands.

Both husbands and wives perceive their spouses positively. They repeatedly describe their partners as good, and sometimes credit the longevity of the marriage to the tolerance and good nature of their spouses. Yet, descriptions offered by both partners are rarely relationship related, rather spouses portray their partners according to how they fulfill specific social roles. Women characterize husbands as good fathers, hard workers, helpful neighbors, and Christian-valued. Men portray their wives as good mothers, fine housekeepers, and having a pleasant demeanor. Rarely, do spouses represent their partners in relationship or personality terms. Descriptions involve what partners do for others, rather than how partners strengthen the marital bond. Again, as Reuter and Webb (1992) noted, older couples have been so confined to conventional roles throughout the marriage, a truly interpersonal relationship has been difficult or undeveloped, even into the later years. Thus, the only way long-term couples view their spouses is in relation to these conventional roles. Qualities like kindness, nurturing, thoughtfulness, and supportiveness are not recognized as the cornerstones of the long-term relationship.

Communication is a key to long-term marital longevity. Spouses talk about an array of topics with their partners frequently and openly. Couples realize the importance of daily communication during mealtimes and bedtime, but also emphasize the need for listening. Long-term partners set aside time to talk or went out occasionally so they could have time alone. Wives are more concerned with the lack of communication than husbands. As Argyle and Furnham (1993) suggested, wives appreciated getting support from their husbands, but were often frustrated with the lack of affective support they received. Husbands express satisfaction with the level of communication in the relationship, but understand their wives are not always as satisfied. However, husbands confess they are uncertain how to improve upon their communication.

Divorce did not seem to be culturally accepted by long-term couples and was consequently, rarely considered as a viable option for ending a difficult marriage. Couples admit to having troubled times, but never felt their marriages were irreparable. Moreover, women feel they lacked the necessary job skills to adequately and independently provide for their families if they ever divorced. A few respondents did contemplate divorce, but quickly dismissed the idea out of concern for their partners and their obligation to marital vows. Long-term couples feel very strongly that divorce is too easy, and contemporary couples need to devote energy into resolving their differences. Marital difficulties are viewed by long-term couples as surmountable and expected, and rarely a cause for divorce.

The long-term couples are surprised on how quickly 50 years of marriage has passed. Despite their lifetime accomplishments, their problems, and their long relationships, some respondents do not feel as old as they are. In fact, many state they have not aged much between their 25th anniversaries and 50th anniversaries. Marriage in the later years of life is described as satisfying by some couples. White et al. (1986) cited that comparatively, couples in the later stages of life reported higher levels of happiness,

satisfaction, and adjustment than those in the middle stages of marriage. Spouses disclose feeling much closer to and more dependent on their partners. Furthermore, individuals indicate their marriages have matured over the years. Finally, several of the individuals testify they would marry the same partner over again, and feel fortunate they have lived such good, long lives.

Symbolic interaction helps describe the process of building a narrative of marital lives. Spouses' recollections of marital conflict and endurance evolves into an interesting communication phenomenon. After years of shared storytelling, the marriage becomes a narrative. As friends and family members question marital partners about their lives together, the story begins to unravel. Each partner tells and shares their vision of marital life accepting or editing his/her spouse's contributions. Sometimes the story is real; sometimes the story is embellished for the better or worse. However, every time the story is told it becomes more intertwined and more predictable. Eventually, the story becomes one. Perhaps, the interview was another arena to retell their co-constructed narrative. Moreover, because of the issue of social desirability, the acceptable or positive version of respondent's stories were possibly given. Thus, the true story of marital conflict in 50 year marriages may never be told nor remembered.

Conflict is a common and natural part of all marriages. However, how couples manage conflict and maintain a relationship over 50 years is particularly intriguing. In this cohort of individuals, traditional roles and values guide marital life greatly. Historically, married couples will never experience the identical external and internal life events that affect these long-term marriages. In fact, the marriages of today are influenced by dramatically different values, patterns of living, role expectations, and period effects. Thus, this study has not only illuminated the marital issues and conflicts of long-term couples, but has given an in-depth perspective to the marital lives of this particular cohort.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The life events, resolution strategies, sources of conflict, and keys to a successful long-term marriage are insightful. Yet, consideration should be taken when examining the candidness of the responses from the individuals. Although individuals were encouraged to be honest and straightforward when discussing their marital conflicts, because of societal expectations and privacy concerns, respondents may have been hesitant about disclosing their true conflict situations. Consequently, the severity of the conflict or the manner in which the conflict was resolved may not have been accurately portrayed. Hence, the present research has some limitations.

In addition, care should be taken in generalizing from the findings of this study, because the sample was not randomly selected and is relatively small. In addition, as mentioned previously in the study, the sample was not easily assembled. The couples' resistance to participate could indeed have been the result of the personal nature of the study. However, the sample also could have been a group of individuals, who were not particularly happy, but were willing to share a rendition of marital happiness based upon the pressure of social desirability. On the other hand, this sample may represent only happily married couples, because unhappy couples may be less likely to volunteer to participate in the study. Hence, the view of the marital quality of older marriages may be skewed (Levenson et al., 1993). Thus, the study serves to create the groundwork for further research. Considering the lack of theories and hypotheses examining long-term marital conflict, the research stands as an exploratory investigation.

Additional research is needed to address theories and hypotheses related to the marriages of long-term couples. Other studies could examine marital relationships longitudinally and investigate if conflict styles are indeed consistent through the life course

of the marriage, or if adaptation changes the style as the relationship endures. An in-depth study examining conflict sources of long-term marriages and how these sources differ from younger marriages could also be investigated. Finally, investigating the gender differences in resolution styles of long-term marriages and short-term marriages needs review.

Obviously, there are many unanswered questions about the communication patterns of the long-term marriage. The enduring nature and adaptation of these relationships needs to be studied further.

Symbolic interaction and the life course perspective are useful theories in understanding and interpreting this older cohort's marital views. Because the interview data were very similar between husbands and wives, despite the fact spouses were questioned separately, we can begin to realize how interdependent and intertwined couples' lives become over a 50 year period. Moreover, the cumulative effect of both positive and negative experiences throughout the marriage influence both spouses' perceptions of the frequency and severity of conflict.

The life course perspective gives dimension to the research findings. On a simplistic level, it is interesting to learn about the sources of conflict and resolution strategies used within a 50 year old marriage. However, when external events and period effects are factored in, the analysis of marital conflicts becomes more complex. It is important for future researchers to be aware of historical, social, and cultural influences to fully understand the dynamics of the marital relationship.

Understanding conflicts in long-term marriages could be very helpful. Long-term marriage research could be beneficial for younger married people. First, younger couples may be able to enrich their own marriages by understanding and learning productive styles of conflict resolution that perhaps will sustain their marriages into the later years. Second, marriage counselors and therapists may be able to use this information from a generational

perspective. If younger couples can identify where they have learned particular conflict strategies or understand why they resolve conflict in a specific manner, they may be able to re-learn constructive styles and patterns that were/were not modeled in their own parents' styles.

Long-term marriage research could also be useful in enriching the lives of couples involved in enduring relationships. So often, marital enrichment programs primarily focus on the needs of newly married or younger couples. Yet, the structure of family in later life drastically changes and affects the marital relationship. After the children leave home, the household becomes a two-person household for up to 30 years (Brubaker & Roberto, 1993). Consequently, couples may need to establish new ways to communicate and deal with conflict. Facilitators and counselors may be able to design marital enrichment programs for the elderly. First, older couples may benefit by identifying the positive aspects of their marital relationship they wish to accentuate and continue into the later years. Next, by teaching couples alternative conflict styles, those people involved in long-term marriages may be able to experience more satisfying relationships than before by opening the lines of dyadic communication. In addition, since traditional couples often deal more with content than relational issues, it may be helpful to teach older couples entrenched in traditional sex roles to communicate directly by employing more feeling and relationship oriented messages.

As the number of older marriages increases over the coming years, family researchers will have the opportunity to examine more long-term marriages. As roles and values in society change, it will continue to be interesting to analyze how partners in 50 year marriages adapt and negotiate to the ever changing problems and dynamics of marital life.

APPENDIX A.
HUMAN SUBJECTS FORMS

Consent Form

I have been advised of the research conditions listed below:

- 1) Data for the study will be collected through interviews, a life graph technique, and free listing. The interview will be audio taped and the tapes will be transcribed for analysis. These techniques will cause little or no discomfort, and I have the right to ask questions about the procedures and stop the interview at any point.
- 2) All of the information will be held in strict confidentiality and if transcriptions of my comments are used, my first name will only be included within the study.
- 3) The interview will take approximately one and a half hours in length.

Since I have been informed about the research conditions,

I _____

willingly choose to participate in the qualitative study and my comments can be used within the study .

Permission to Audio tape Form

To better serve the researcher in her effort to gather quality information, interview sessions will be audio tape recorded. These recordings will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used in the research study using the informant's first name.

I (we) hereby give permission to audio record my (our) interview for purposes of improving the quality of the information received. I (we) understand that a condition of this consent is respect of my (our) privacy and the confidential nature of our research relationship.

Signature (s)

Date

Researcher

APPENDIX B.

SAMPLE OF TRANSCRIPT

One word. Well, basically it has to come down to love. There are many aspects that work with it, but you have to love each other or it won't work.

A passionate love?

No, that leaves you. The passionate love is there at first but it grows so that the passionate is there at times, but it's not the passionate love that you have at first, but it grows into a stable love, a dependable love. One that, how do I say it, very dependable, you know it's there, you know, you can, well, you just know it is always there even though you do some dumb things, it is a forgiving thing.

Describe, you said you clam up. Describe how you deal with conflict.

Well, I didn't used to and sometimes it's better that I do because I have a habit of blowing my top which is not good because then things are said that I regret later so I have learned to just kind of, when it gets to a point, I just don't talk and boy he knows when I don't talk that, I have really had it. Because when I do that, I will, if I don't, I am going to blow my stack and regret things that I say later because when you're mad you just blow, and I have learned that I am better off just to shut up and come back to it another time because Dean is a person who has to delve into the reasoning of everything. I don't. I don't like it, that's it, and he wants to know why. So when it gets to the point that I get mad, he'll want to try to make me say why, then I get madder, so its, I have just learned that this is better. So it's his way and my way.

And what is his way?

Well, when he gets mad he wants to know the whys of everything and so he will, I call it, badger me, and he doesn't feel that he is, but I say just back off. Well, he doesn't know how to back off if he is really after something, and so that has been the something we have had to learn between us.

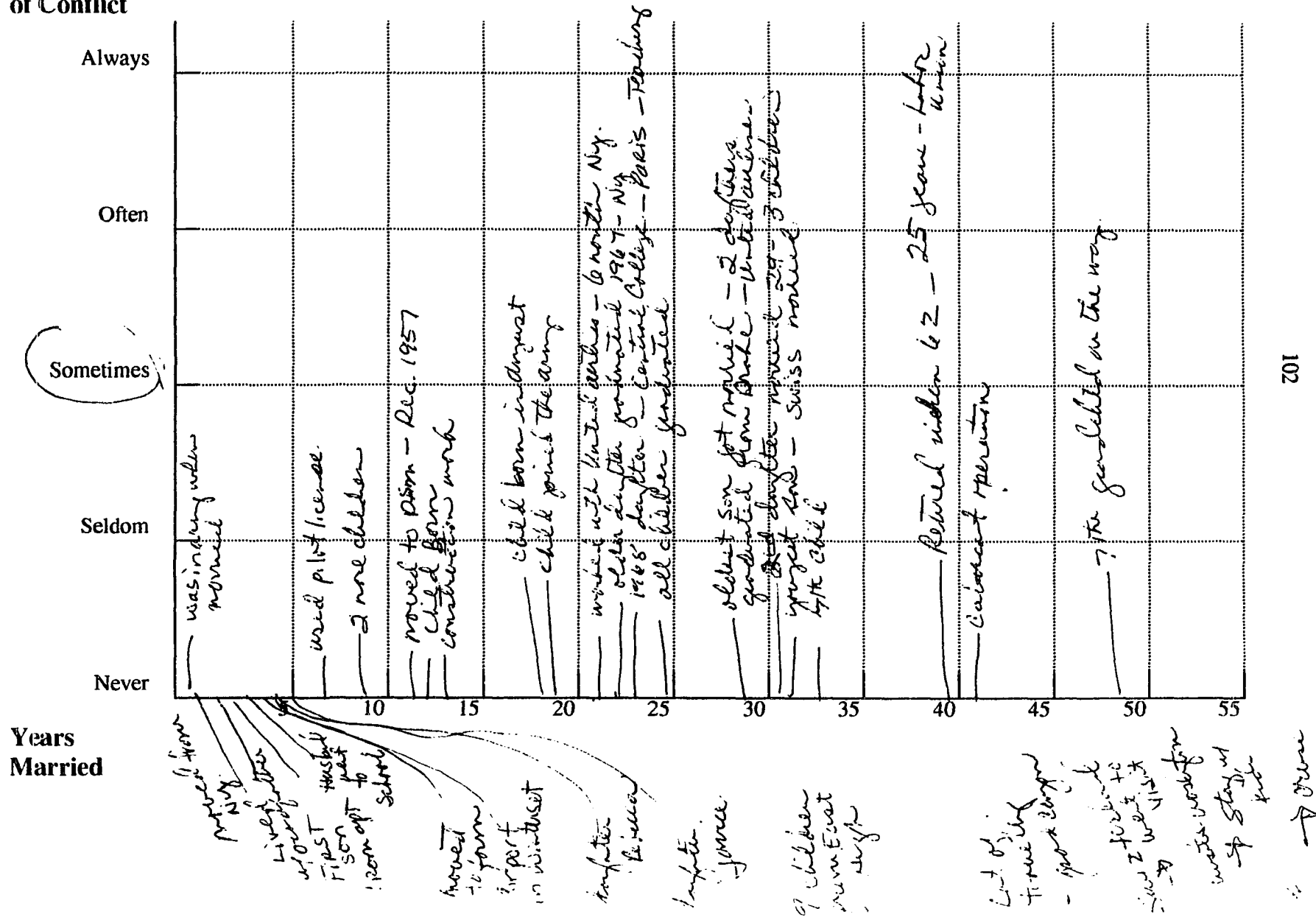
How about families? Were they ever an intrusion into your relationship? Like his family or your family?

No, my family were in the Black Hills, and we saw them very little. His family, we had to live with when we first came back here because we couldn't find a place to live. It was after the war and no house is big enough for two women when she has children still at home. She had an eight year old still at home, and we had a baby. So resentful ideas. Like my mother said, well, whose home is it? She was a quiet, calm woman and I said, OK. So mainly that. But outside of that, no. My father-in-law was very much like my husband. A very meek man, and he was always there if you needed him. They had been no problem, and I have a sister and a brother. My sister has been an integral part of our family, she lives on the West Coast, and so we have never lived around my family. His family all live, almost all of them, live right around here. But they are not a real close family, so it has not been a problem. No, none at all.

APPENDIX C.
SAMPLE OF LIFE GRAPHS

Frequency
of Conflict

Life Chart



44

Life Chart



103

was good
+ the said

Life Chart

Frequency
of Conflict

Always

Often

Sometimes

Seldom

Never

Years
Married

104

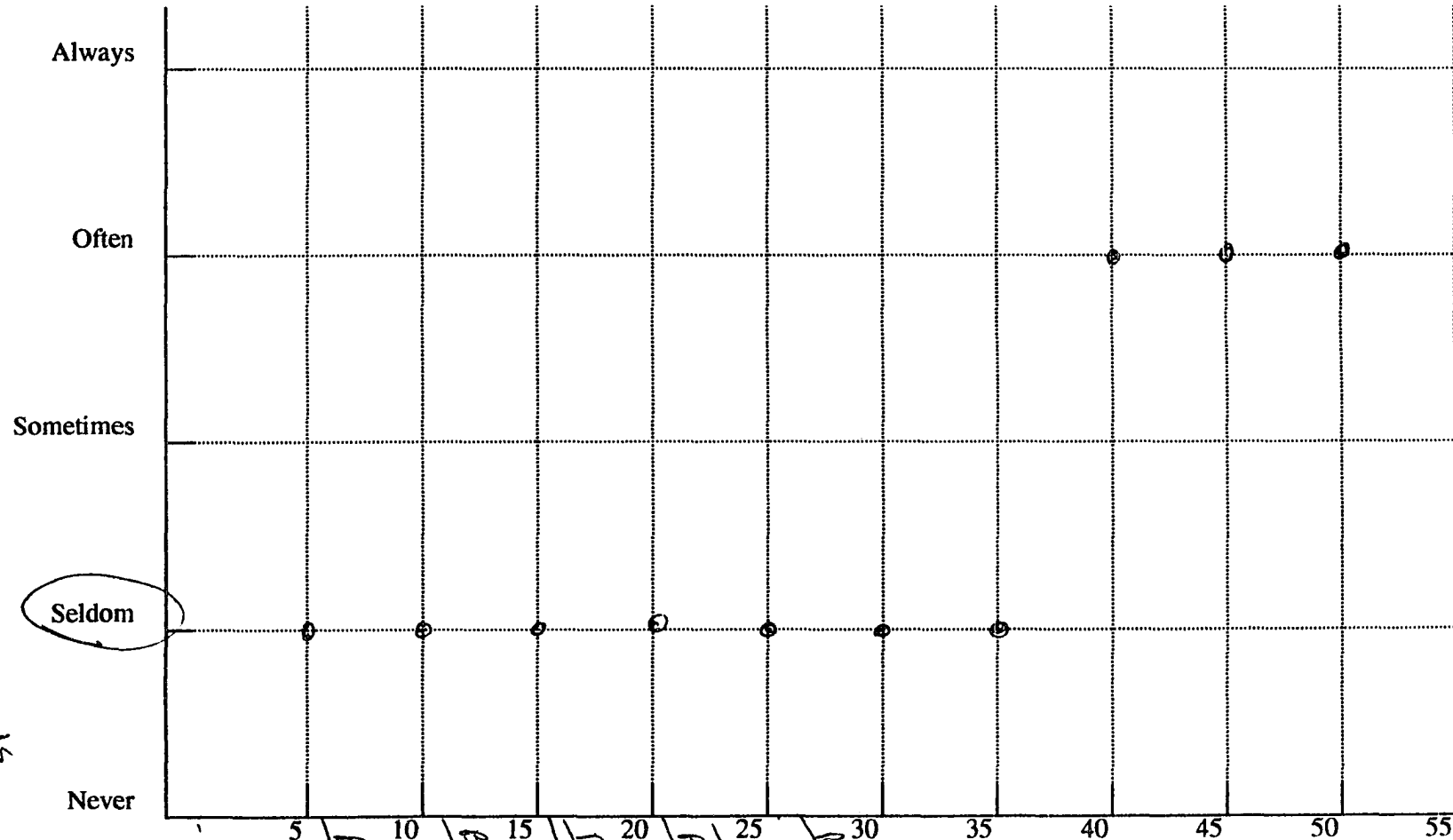
Not
much
conflict
↓

5 changed jobs
10 1st child
15 girl born
18 girl moved from us
20 1st child
25 25 years w/ company
35 father died
40 wife's mother died
45 1984 retired
50 wife's brother died
55

D(1)F

Frequency
of Conflict

Life Chart



105

Years
Married

conflict - all
communication is
halted

REFERENCES

Acitelli, L., Douvan, E., & Veroff, J. (1993). Perceptions of conflict in the first year of marriage: How important are similarity and understanding. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 10, 5-19.

Ade-Ridder, L. (1985). Quality of marriage: A comparison between golden wedding couples and couples married less than fifty years'. Lifestyles: A Journal of Changing Patterns, 7, 224-237.

Aldous, J. (1990). Family development and the life course: Two perspectives on family change. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 52, 571-583.

Allen, K., & Pickett, R. (1987). Forgotten streams in the family life course: Utilization of qualitative retrospective interviews in the analysis of lifelong single women's family careers. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 49, 517-526.

Argyle, M., & Furnham, A. (1983). Sources of satisfaction and conflict in long-term relationships. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 45, 481-493.

Atchley, R. (1988). Social forces and aging. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing.

Back, K., & Bourque, L. (1968). Life graphs: Aging and cohort effect. Journal of Gerontology, 25(3), 249-255.

Backett, K. (1987). The negotiation of fatherhood. In C. Lewis & M. O'Brien (Eds.), Reassessing fatherhood: New observations on fathers and the modern family. London: Sage.

Bellaby, P. (1991). Histories of sickness: Making use of multiple accounts of the same process. In S. Dex (Ed.), Life and work history analyses, (pp. 20-42). Routledge: Sociological Review.

Berryman-Fink, C., & Brunner, C. (1987). The effects of sex of source and target on interpersonal conflict management styles. Southern Speech Communication Journal, 53, 38-48.

Blumer, H. (1969). Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Bourque, L., & Back, K. (1977). Life graphs and life events. Journal of Gerontology, 32 (6), 669-674.

Brotherson, M.J. (1990, October). A qualitative orientation toward early intervention research: Indicators of rigor. Paper presented at DEC, Albuquerque, N.M.

Brubaker, T., & Kinsel, B. (1985). Who is responsible for household tasks in long term marriages of the "young-old" elderly. Lifestyles: A Journal of Changing Patterns, 5, 238-247.

Brubaker, T., & Roberto, K. (1993). Family life education for the later years. Family Relations, 42, 212-221.

Burke, R., Weir, T., & Harrison, D. (1976). Disclosure of problems and tensions experienced by marital partners. Psychological Reports, 38, 531-542.

Cahn, D. (1990). Intimates in conflict: A communication perspective. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Canary, D., Cunningham, E., & Cody, M. (1988). Goal types, gender, and locus of control in managing interpersonal conflict. Communication Research, 15, 426-446.

Canary, D., Weger, H., & Stafford, L. (1991). Couple's argument sequences and their associations with relational characteristics. Western Journal of Communication, 55, 159-179.

Chatters, L., & Taylor, R. (1989). Life problems and coping strategies of older black adults. Social Work, 34, 313-319.

Christiansen, A., & Pasch, L. (1993). The sequence of marital conflict: An analysis of seven phases of marital conflict in distressed and non-distressed couples. Clinical Psychology Review, 13, 3-14.

Christiansen, A., & Shenk, J.L. (1991). Communication, conflict, and psychological distance in nondistressed, clinic, and divorcing couples. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 59, 458-463.

Cloven, D., & Roloff, M. (1991). Sense-making activities and interpersonal conflict: communication cures for the mulling blues. Western Journal of Speech Communication, 55, 134-158.

Cole, C. (1985). Relationship quality in long-term marriages: A Comparison of high quality and low quality marriages. Lifestyles: A Journal of Changing Patterns, 7, 248-257.

Crohan, S. (1992). Marital happiness and spousal consensus on beliefs about marital conflict: A longitudinal investigation. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 9, 89-102.

Dex, S. (1991). Life and work history analyses. In S. Dex (Ed.), Life and work history analyses, (pp. 1-19). Routledge: Sociological Review.

Ekerdt, D., & Vinick, B. (1991). Marital complaints in husband working and husband retired couples. Research on Aging, 13, 364-382.

Elder, G. (1974). Children of the great depression. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ferguson, D. (1993). Something a little out of the ordinary: Reflections on becoming an interpretivist researcher in special education. Remedial and Special Education, 14, 35-43.

Fisher, C., Reid, J., & Melendez, M. (1989). Conflict in families and friendships of later life. Family Relations, 38, 83-89.

Fitzpatrick, M. (1988). Between husbands and wives. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Fontana, A., & Frey, J. (1994). Interviewing: The art of science. In N. Denzin, Y. Lincoln (Ed.), Handbook of qualitative research, (pp. 361-374). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Gilford, R. (1986, Summer). Marriage in later life, Generations, 16-21.

Glick, P.C., & Norton, A.J. (1977). Marrying, divorcing, and living together in the U.S. today. Popular Bulletin, 32, 5.

Gottman, J. (1991). Predicting the longitudinal course of marriages. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 17, 3-7.

Gottman, J.M. (1982). Emotional responsiveness in marital conversations. Journal of Communication, 16, 108-119.

Greenbaum, J. & Rader, L. (1989). Marital problems of the "old" elderly as they present to a mental health clinic. Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 14, 111-126.

Guba, E. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. Educational Communication and Technology: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Development, 29 (2), 75-91.

Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1982). Epistemological and methodological bases of naturalistic inquiry. Educational Communication and Technology Journal, 30, 233-252.

Haefner, P., Notarius, C., & Pellegrini, D. (1991). Determinants of satisfaction with marital discussions: An exploration of husband-wife differences. Behavioral Assessment, 13, 67-82.

Hall, J. (1987). Parent-adolescent conflict: An empirical review. Adolescence, 88, 767- 789.

Hawkins, J.L., Weisberg, C., & Ray, D. (1980). Spouse differences in communication style: Preference, perception, behavior. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 42, 585-593.

Heyman, D., & Jeffers, R. (1968). Wives and retirement: A pilot study. Journal of Gerontology, 23, 488-496.

Honeycutt, J., Woods, B., & Fontenot, K. (1993). The endorsement of communication conflict rules as a function of engagement, marriage, and marital ideology. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 10, 285-304.

Hurwicz, M., Durham, C., Davis, S., Gatz, M., & Bengston, V. (1992). Salient life events in three generation families. Journal of Gerontology, 47, 11-13.

Kirchler, E. (1988). Marital happiness and interaction in everyday surroundings: A time sample diary approach for couples. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 5, 375-382.

Lasswell, M., & Peterson, J. (1981, October). Geritol and candlelight: Marriage in the older years. Paper presented at the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, San Diego.

Laur, R., & Laur, J. (1986). Factors in long-term marriages. Journal of Family Issues, 7 (4), 382-390.

Lee, G. (1988). Marital satisfaction in later life: The effects of nonmarital roles. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 50, 775-783.

Lee, G., & Shehan, C. (1989). Retirement and marital satisfaction. Journal of Gerontology, 44, 226-230.

- Levenson, R., Carstensen, L., & Gottman, J. (1993). Long-term marriage: Age, gender, and satisfaction. Psychology and Aging, 8(2), 301-313.
- Levenson, R.W., & Gottman, J.M. (1985). Physiological and affective predictors of change in relationship satisfaction. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 49, 85-94.
- Lloyd, S.A. (1987). Conflict in premarital relationships: Differential perceptions of males and females. Family Relations, 36, 290-294.
- Lloyd, S.A. (1990). A behavioral self-report technique for assessing conflict in close relationships. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 7, 265-272.
- MacKinnon, R., MacKinnon, C., & Franken, M. (1984). Family strengths in long term marriages. Lifestyles: A Journal of Changing Patterns, 7, 114-126.
- Marsiglio, W., & Donnelly, D. (1991). Sexual relations in later life: A national study of married persons. Journal of Gerontology, 46, 338-344.
- Martin, P. (1985). The experience of micro and macro events: A life span analysis. Doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University.
- Martin, T.C., & Bumpass, L.L. (1989). Recent trends in marital disruption. Demography, 26, 37-51.
- McGonagle, K., Kessler, R., & Schilling, E. (1992). The frequency and determinants of marital disagreements in a community sample. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 9, 507-524.
- Moon, S., Dillon, D., & Sprenkle, D. (1990). Family therapy and qualitative research. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 16 (4), 357-373.
- Noller, P., & Fitzpatrick, M.A. (1993). Communication in family relationships. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

- Pearson, J. (1993). Communication in the family. New York: Harper Collins College.
- Quirouette, C., & Gold, D. (1992). Spousal characteristics as predictors of well-being in older couples. Int'l Journal Aging and Human Development, 34, 257-269.
- Reuter, T., & Webb, L. (1992). The age and communication styles associated with relational marital types. Paper presented at the 1992 meeting of Speech Communication Association.
- Roberts, W. (1980). Significant elements in the relationship of long-married couples. International Journal of Aging and Human Development, 10, 265-272.
- Robinson, L., & Blanton, P. (1993). Marital strengths of enduring marriages. Family Relations, 42, 38-45.
- Rowe, G., & Meredith, W. (1982). Quality in marital relationships after twenty-five years. Family Perspective, 16, 149-155.
- Sanbourin, S., Laporte, L., & Wright, J. (1990). Problem solving self-appraisal and coping efforts in distressed and nondistressed couples. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 16, 89-97.
- Sanders, G., & Walters, J. (1984). Life satisfaction and family strengths of older couples. Lifestyles: A Journal of Changing Patterns, 7, 194-205.
- Schumm, W., & Burgaighis, M. (1986). Marital quality over the marital career: Alternative explanations. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 48, 165-168.
- Segrin, C., & Fitzpatrick, M.A. (1992). Depression and verbal aggressiveness in different marital couple types. Communication Studies, 43, 79-91.
- Sillars, A., Coletti, S., Parry, D. & Rogers, M. (1982). Coding verbal conflict tactics: Nonverbal and perceptual correlates of the "Avoidance-distributive-integrative" distinction. Human Communication Research, 9, 83-95.

Smetana, J. (1989). Adolescents' and parents' reasoning about actual family conflict. Child Development, 60, 1052-1067.

South, S., & Spitze, G. (1986). Determinants of divorce over the marital life course. American Sociological Review, 51, 583-590.

Sporakowski, M., & Axelson, L. (1984). Long-term marriages: A critical review. Lifestyles: A Journal of Changing Patterns, 7, 76-93.

Stephen, T. (1984). A symbolic exchange framework for the development of intimate relationships. Human Relations, 37, 393-408.

Stinnett, N., Carter, L. & Montgomery, J. (1972). Older persons' perceptions of their marriages. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 34, 665-670.

Swenson, C., & Moore, C. (1979). Marriages that endure. In E. Corfman (ed.), Families Today, Vol. 1, (pp. 249-286). Rockville, MD: National Institutes of Mental Health, Science Monographs 1.

Swenson, C., Eskew, R. & Kohlhepp, K. (1984). Five factors in long-term marriages. Lifestyles: A Journal of Changing Patterns, 7, 94-105.

Taylor, S. (1984). Introduction to qualitative research methods: The search for meanings. (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley.

Tesch, R. (1987). Comparing methods of qualitative analysis: What do they have in common? Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Washington.

Traupmann, J., Eckels, E., & Hatfield, E. (1982). Intimacy in older women's lives. The Gerontologist, 22 (6), 493-498.

Troll, L., Miller, S., & Atchley, R. (1979). Families in later life. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing.

- Ward, R. (1993). Marital happiness and household equity in later life. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 55, 427-438.
- Weishaus, S., & Field, D. (1988). A half century of marriage: Continuity or change? Journal of Marriage and the Family, 50, 763-774.
- White, J.M. (1985). Perceived similarity and understanding in married couples. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 2, 45-57.
- White, L., Booth, A., & Edwards, J. (1986). Children and marital happiness: Why the negative correlation? Journal of Family Issues, 7, 131-147.
- Wolinsky, M.A. (1986). Marital therapy with older couples. Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work, 67, 475-483.
- Zietlow, P., & Sillars, A. (1988). Life-Stage differences in communication during marital conflicts. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 5, 223-245.